Saskatchewan's Regional Colleges:

Towards a New System

REGIONAL COLLEGE REVIEW **FINAL REPORT** • MARCH 31, 2011

REGIONAL COLLEGE REVIEW **OVERVIEW**

The 2010 Regional Colleges Review was initiated by the Honourable Rob Norris, Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration, to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the Regional College system in relation to its legislated mandate. *The Regional Colleges Act* requires that a review be conducted at least once every five years to review and report on the mandate of the regional colleges and any other matters concerning the *Act*.

There are seven regional colleges in Saskatchewan: Carlton Trail, Cumberland, Great Plains, Northlands, North West, Parkland and Southeast Regional College.

The review assessed the effectiveness and efficiency of the regional college system, its alignment with government objectives and priorities, as well as the colleges' planning and governance arrangements. Dr. Michael Atkinson, executive director and professor of the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, led the 2010 review of the regional college system. His recommendations, outlined in this report, are intended to improve the operation and funding of the regional colleges in light of a rapidly changing post-secondary environment.

MESSAGE FROM **THE REGIONAL COLLEGE REVIEW CHAIR**

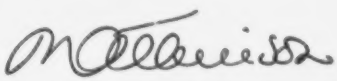
I am very pleased to have been asked by Minister Norris to lead the 2010-11 review of the regional college system. The review was conducted under the auspices of the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy and with the assistance of Kathleen McNutt, a professor at the school's University of Regina campus. Dr. McNutt served as the review's principal researcher and was ably assisted in this task by Kevin Meacher, a student in the school. We would like to acknowledge the contribution of colleagues, particularly Dan Perrins and Murray Fulton, who helped improve the text, and Heather McWhinney, Erica Schindel and Amber McCuaig who supplied excellent editorial assistance.

In his letter launching the review, the minister asked that the review focus on "*the effectiveness and efficiency of the system in relation to its legislated mandate and alignment with government objectives.*" This proved to be a challenging task. Regional colleges are complicated organizations with broad mandates and they operate in an environment that is changing in ways that are hard to anticipate. Nonetheless, our report offers observations and recommendations that address, if they don't entirely resolve, the efficiency/effectiveness challenge.

There are many positive things to say about regional colleges, not the least of which is the commitment of leaders and volunteers to improving the quality of educational life in the province. Naturally this report concentrates on those features of regional colleges that are most in need of change and on those changes most likely to move the regional college agenda forward. Readers of the report will note that it is straightforward in its diagnosis of problems and occasionally blunt in its assessment of the current situation.

The good news is that the province has, going forward, a strong team of administrators and leaders who are committed to repairing deficiencies and taking advantage of opportunities. Throughout our travels and our conversations we were impressed by the dedication and intelligence of everyone we met. I hope this report meets just a few of their expectations.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the province in this capacity.



Dr. Michael Atkinson, Chair
2010-11 Regional College Review

REGIONAL COLLEGE **REVIEW REPORT**

REVIEW AUTHOR

Michael M. Atkinson is a professor in and executive director of the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina. He was educated at the University of Alberta and Carleton University, where he completed his PhD in 1978. For over twenty years, Michael was a faculty member in the department of political science at McMaster University where he also served as department chair and associate vice-president academic. From 1997 until 2007, he was provost and vice-president academic at the University of Saskatchewan. Michael has published widely on topics related to corruption, ethics, decision making and higher education. His work has won several awards and been reprinted in various anthologies. In the early 1990s, Michael served as editor of *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*. He is currently on the Saskatchewan Archives Board and has chaired Campus Saskatchewan (2005-06) and the Saskatchewan Academic Health Sciences Network (2006-07).

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JOHNSON-SHOYAMA GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

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In a province renowned for innovation, the school provides students with a full spectrum of public policy and administration education - from policy concepts and theory to hands-on practical application. The challenging curriculum provides opportunities for students to exercise their critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, and to address policy issues that have a regional, national and international focus. Suited for individuals looking to begin their careers or advance their professional study, the school offers five programs - Master of International Trade (MIT), Master of Public Administration (MPA), Master of Public Policy (MPP), PhD in Public Policy (PhD), and various Master's Certificates.

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EXECUTIVE **SUMMARY**

The *Regional Colleges Act* mandates that Saskatchewan's regional colleges must be reviewed every five years. In September 2010, the Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration, Rob Norris, asked Michael Atkinson, executive director of the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, to conduct the review. During the fall and winter of 2010-2011, Dr. Atkinson and his colleague Professor Kathleen McNutt visited each of the regional colleges where they met with CEOs, administrators, board members, instructors, students and members of the various communities. They also interviewed officials from government, SIAST and the province's two universities. This report is the product of both this consultative process and an analysis of government reports, academic research and policy documents.

Key Themes

The *Regional Colleges Act* envisages a system of regionally distributed educational opportunities for citizens living in rural and northern communities. While the *Act* does not use this terminology, it is clear that two principles guide the operation of the regional colleges: *territoriality* and *hierarchy*. As the title of the *Act* implies, the minister has the authority to "determine the geographic area of Saskatchewan in which a regional college is to provide services…" (S. 4). However, the term "regional" has come to mean "territorial" in the sense that programming in a defined geographical area is reserved for a single college. Collaboration, cooperation and coordination are not among the colleges' organizational premises and as a result the colleges show limited capacity to function as a system.

The principle of hierarchy is evident in two ways. First, the regional colleges "broker" courses created by other educational providers. Program requirements, ministerial correspondence and existing norms make it clear that regional colleges are to be primarily the organizers not the creators of educational opportunities. The second element of hierarchy involves the relationship between the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration and the regional colleges. The minister is given authority to provide general direction and specific funding to the colleges, to approve capital expenditures and financial obligations, to redraw boundaries, and, *in extremis*, to take a given college under direct administrative authority. Taken together, and combined with the authority to recommend board membership, the current relationship provides government with significant tools to directly manage the colleges.

Working in a hierarchical setting and within a specified territory, have served the colleges well for almost 40 years. However, the landscape of post-secondary education is shifting. The Internet, increasing student mobility, globalization of markets, the new knowledge economy and increased competition for students are rendering boundaries somewhat artificial. In Saskatchewan, a robust economy, increased immigration and an evolving labour market suggest the need for colleges that are more flexible, innovative and resourceful.

How should the colleges and the government respond to these changes? More to the point, will their current organization enable them to respond? In establishing the review the minister indicated that serious consideration should be given to the requirements of efficiency and effectiveness. The effectiveness criterion forces attention on how to conceive of the goal to be achieved, while efficiency describes the extent to which money, time and/or effort are best used to achieve it. Measuring the colleges' organizational performance in terms of inputs and outputs (efficiency) and in terms of how the actual effects measure up to the original policy objective (effectiveness) is a perilous task. There are no easy formulas because inputs and outputs are measured on different scales and agreement on, and clarity regarding, objectives is often elusive. Measurement difficulties do not mean that efficiency and effectiveness criteria are somehow pointless, but it does mean that using them requires judgement, both on the part of those who are responsible for allocating resources toward priorities and those responsible for evaluating the wisdom of these choices.

Better judgements are likely if regional colleges adopt some of the tools of modern management, including the development of performance indicators that connect mission statements to action plans and outcome measures. The regional colleges have begun exploring the use of a balanced scorecard approach to meet this challenge. It has its limitations, of course, but the ideas behind it are broadly congenial to government and non-

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Better judgements are likely if regional colleges adopt some of the tools of modern management, including the development of performance indicators that connect mission statements to action plans and outcome measures. The regional colleges have begun exploring the use of a balanced scorecard approach to meet this challenge. It has its limitations, of course, but the ideas behind it are broadly congenial to government and non-

profit organizations. For one thing, the balanced scorecard is not an approach dominated by financial measures. For government and non-profit organizations, where the bottom line involves non-financial as well as financial considerations, this approach is one way of ensuring that the financial health of the organization is a means to its ultimate social ambitions.

While governance may seem rather remote from efficiency and effectiveness, neither regional colleges nor other organizations can reach their efficiency and effectiveness goals in the absence of strong governance arrangements. Saskatchewan regional colleges have autonomous boards of governors appointed through Orders-in-Council. Boards are responsible for the fiscal management and policy direction of the college, as well as for ensuring that operations are carried out in accordance with provincial legislation. Accountability between the minister and each of these boards is outlined in legislation and board chairs are expected to establish a working relationship and a line of communication that ensures the responsible minister is informed of general directions and specific developments. The colleges would be well served by ensuring that the judgements of board members are strengthened by an intimate familiarity with the practices and procedures that improve accountability.

Emerging (and Enduring) Tensions

Changes in the learning environment, new assignments from government and a growing sense of entrepreneurialism have generated some tensions in the regional college system over the past several years. Tensions are identified in three areas:

College-to-College Relations. Until recently the college system has been little more than the sum of its parts. Because each college is assigned a territory and expected to develop relationships with local and provincial partners, there are very few formal mechanisms to require, or even encourage, cooperation beyond information sharing. The colleges are far from planning offerings in a coordinated manner to meet agreed upon needs and provincially mandated targets. They are inclined to see one another as potential threats rather than as potential partners.

Colleges and Other Post-Secondary Providers. While colleges enjoy an unrivaled relationship with local industry, broadly defined, and can offer tailored programming to meet "just-in-time" educational needs, a large part of college programming is "brokered" from SIAST and the universities. The concept of brokering is understood to involve the local offering of another institution's program. Fees are paid and students obtain a credential that is recognized by the originating institution. In this model, the colleges are literally the sites on which programs are offered, and proximity is the principal advantage from the student's point of view. The value added by the college is small given that the senior institutions must approve instructors and the curriculum cannot be significantly adjusted. Colleges increasingly chafe under this format and, with some justification, argue that they can do much more.

Colleges and the Ministry. The *Regional Colleges Act* goes into some detail regarding the ministry's control over the affairs of the colleges. Control largely takes the form of approvals for programming and capital investments and reporting requirements for budgets. The ministry cannot be faulted for exercising due diligence, but there is good reason to urge that both colleges and the ministry develop a planning process that would allow for more college independence and more strategic ministerial oversight. At the moment a dampening of innovation and experimentation may offset the benefits of control.

Recommendations

Regional colleges have outgrown their original mandate. Expectations of higher learning have changed and the demand for some form of post-secondary education has increased dramatically since the colleges were originally conceived. Whether in aggregate terms—a better educated Saskatchewan—or in terms of specific skills and trades, the province needs a set of post-secondary institutions that can keep the province competitive internationally. Saskatchewan needs to unleash the province's capacity to meet its educational needs and that will mean rethinking the role of all players, including regional colleges.

To achieve a new system of regional colleges, displaying these qualities requires a strong dose of clarity regarding what it is supposed to achieve. The "system", in other words, needs its own mandate. Quite apart from the strategic planning and document preparation that each college is expected to produce, the system requires its own plan, something that is already emerging but which depends upon provincial leadership to be fully realized. This mandate should reflect the needs of industry, the demands of students and the opportunities presented in local communities.

To that end we make the following recommendations:

Recommendations: Mandate

1.1 The *Regional Colleges Act* should be revised to indicate that the colleges constitute a coordinated system of distributed learning opportunities that is an integral part of the post-secondary education system. This system has a constructive, and not merely derivative, role to play in the economic development of the province and the intellectual development of the province's students.

1.2 Subject to conditions set out below (see Quality Assurance), regional colleges should be permitted to develop their own programs and credentials in areas of emerging demand that are not currently served by other educational providers in the province or that cannot be readily brokered from institutions in other jurisdictions.

Recommendations: Strategic Planning

2.1 Regional colleges should be given stewardship responsibility in their respective regions for contributing to a rigorous, system-level educational needs assessment that is premised on matching provincial labour market conditions to programming choices in areas deemed critical for the provincial economy.

2.2 The Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration should expedite the development of a Saskatchewan labour market analysis (using information from the regional colleges, the Apprenticeship Commission and other reliable sources) to establish provincial targets for education and skills training programming in areas deemed critical for the provincial economy.

2.3 Regional college plans for university courses should articulate with the enrolment plans of the province's universities, which in turn need to consider making greater use of the colleges to expand their student base.

Recommendations: Programming

3.1 The colleges should continue to broker programming developed by SIAST and seek to ensure credit transfer, but colleges should also be encouraged to seek low cost alternatives from out-of-province suppliers where SIAST is unable or unwilling to approve program offerings.

3.2 The current trend toward developing expertise in particular training areas should be formally recognized with each college given the opportunity to petition for "leadership status" in one or more areas of recognized competence.

3.3 An Adult Basic Education Strategy should be developed in conjunction with other ministries of government (for example, Ministries of Education and Social Services) that would commit the province to multi-year performance targets for graduation and allow certain regional colleges to be awarded "leadership status" in this area.

Recommendations: Quality Assurance

4.1 As a matter of priority, regional colleges should be required to develop and make public a set of system-wide performance indicators consisting of financial and non-financial measures which embody the strategic aims of the system, reflect efficiency and effectiveness criteria, and are aligned with the Government of Saskatchewan Accountability Framework.

4.2 New programs of study leading to a college certificate should be submitted to a Program Approvals Committee chaired by an official of the provincial government and consisting of at least three members appointed by the government and drawn from the regional colleges and other higher education providers in the province.

4.3 A database must be conceived and implemented such that the data required to monitor the implementation of strategic goals and measure progress against performance indicators is collected using common definitions and agreed upon classifications.

4.4 To enhance planning capabilities and to foster a student-centred higher education system in the province, consideration should be given to introducing at the primary school level a student identification system which would permit colleges, as well as other education providers, to track the ways and places in which students in Saskatchewan access educational opportunities in the province.

Recommendations: Budgets

5.1 The ministry should develop an overall operating budget for the regional college system and allocate resources to each college based on: (1) a fixed cost formula reflective of the intended scale of operations, and (2) an activities based formula reflective of the costs of agreed upon programming.

5.2 Within the limits imposed by legislation and by requirements of other funding partners, regional colleges should be permitted to move funds between budgets to achieve economies and realize priorities.

5.3 To encourage experimentation and innovation, the government's annual budget allocation should include a provision for the development of new programs that have been agreed to in principle by the Program Review Committee.

Recommendations: Governance

6.1 A model set of by-laws should be developed that could be used, with appropriate amendments, by all regional college boards. These by-laws should, among other things, outline the duties and responsibilities of members and provide for a Governance and Executive Committee to develop criteria for board composition and identify potential board members.

6.2 The ministry should develop a training program for all board members based on sound governance models and delivered in the context of publicly funded higher education.

7. System Evolution

7.1 Provisions should be made within government to ensure that responsibility for the evolution of the system of regional colleges—their number, their notional boundaries and their strategic objectives—are vested in the ministry with adequate opportunities for representation to be made by the regional colleges.

7.2 The Saskatchewan Association of Regional Colleges should undertake to present to the ministry and the public at large with an annual report that recounts the progress of the system toward its performance goals and features the particular achievements of each college.

7.3 The current website that purports to explain the regional college system in Saskatchewan should be dismantled and replaced by an integrated student-centered portal that provides information regarding current programming and certification within the regional college system including information regarding admission and registration.

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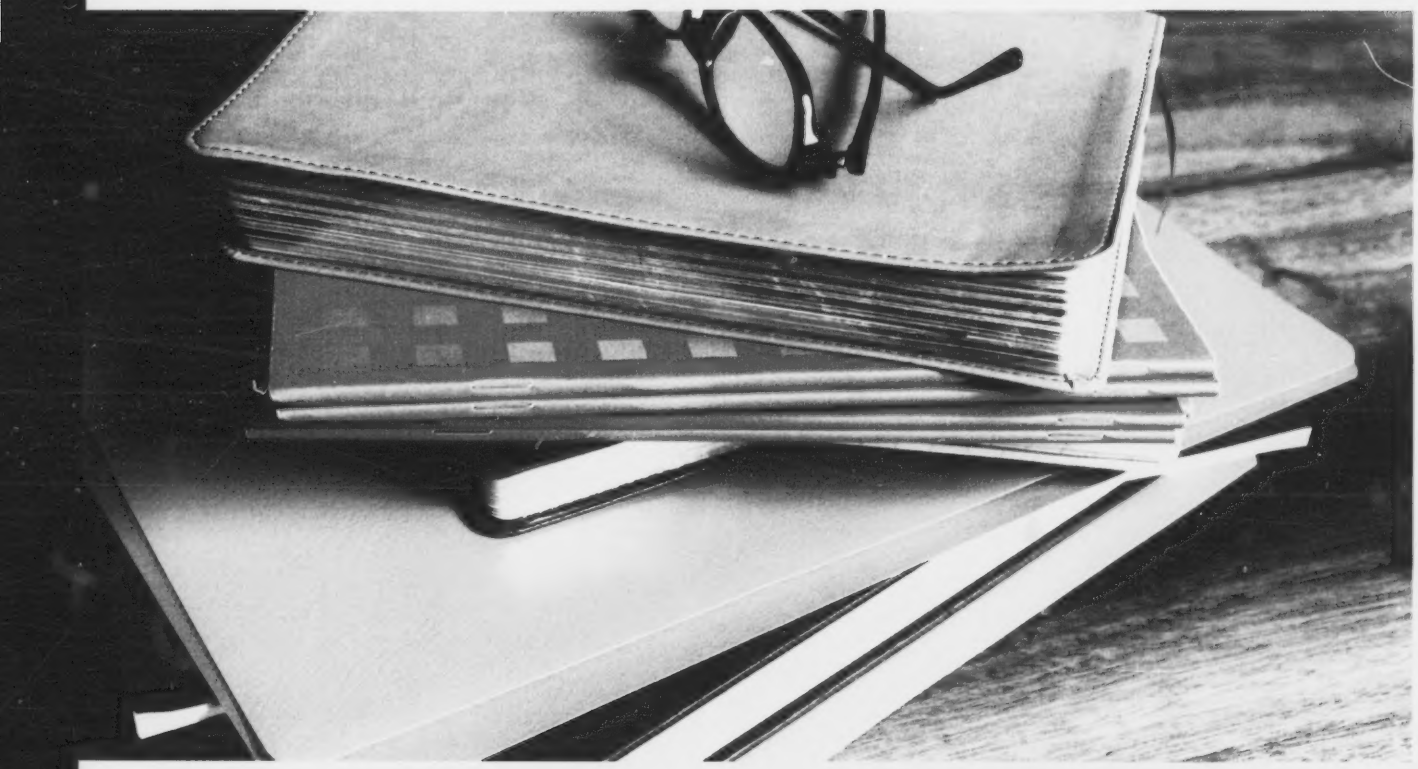
1.0 INTRODUCTION



A statutory requirement of the *Regional Colleges Act* is a five-year review of the regional colleges' mandate to ensure that the system continues to provide efficient and high-quality educational programming and post-secondary training opportunities to adult learners across Saskatchewan. The 2010 Regional Colleges Review Committee was appointed by the Honourable Rob Norris, Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration, to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the regional college system in relation to its legislated mandate.

The report begins with a summary statement of its overarching theme and a brief outline of the documentary and interview sources that gave rise to the report's general direction. It turns then to the broad environment and a profile of the colleges. No claim is made to originality in these sections, but it is vital to appreciate the trajectory of the college system against the changing environment for higher education in the country and around the world. The remaining sections of the report take up the issue of efficiency and effectiveness (which the minister referenced in his letter establishing the review), the tensions that have arisen over the past decade or more, and the difficult policy questions they pose. In the final section of the report a set of recommendations is provided, not to end deliberation and discussion, but to guide it in a fruitful direction.

1.1 Regional Colleges: Some Background

The purpose of the regional colleges is to provide access to post-secondary education and training in rural, small urban and northern communities. The regional colleges' mandate is established under Saskatchewan's *Regional Colleges Act*, which was proclaimed on January 1, 1988. Section 5 of the *Act* describes the programming a regional college may offer:

- University and technical institute courses provided by way of a contract between the college and a university or technical institute;
- Training programs that prepare individuals for a career or provide education with respect to health or social issues;
- Training programs paid wholly or partly by private business, non-profit groups or government agencies;
- Career services;
- Adult basic education, literacy and upgrading programs;
- Any other educational activities that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may prescribe in the regulations.

Prior to the establishment of the regional college system, Saskatchewan had a number of community colleges that provided a wide variety of courses including general interest programming. In 1969, an advisory committee chaired by Don Faris had recommended the creation of an integrated grid of distributed learning centres that would utilize local resources, instructors and facilities to deliver educational opportunities in rural and northern communities. Using a community development approach to adult education, the original philosophy was to empower local residents to determine programming. The *Faris Report (1972: 20)* recommended that the community colleges "maximize opportunities for continuing education through a decentralization of formal adult learning opportunities and the organization of programs at a community and regional level to meet informal learning needs." The *Community Colleges Act*, passed in May 1973, established the colleges as instruments for improving the quality of rural life by serving the continuing education needs of adults living in rural Saskatchewan.

In 1979, following a review of the community college system, it was recommended that the colleges' role in the provincial learning system be expanded, and in 1986 a new provincial policy framework for adult education, *Preparing for the Year 2000: Adult Education in Saskatchewan*, was unveiled. The *Community Colleges Act* was replaced in 1987 with the *Regional Colleges Act*, which changed the name community college to regional college. Their new mandate excluded general interest and recreation courses and expanded the colleges' capacity to offer credit programs to local residents. Concerns about cost and quality assurance were to be addressed through a brokerage model in which colleges would identify local needs and purchase courses from the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina.

There are currently seven regional colleges in Saskatchewan: Carlton Trail, Cumberland, Great Plains, Northlands, North West, Parkland and Southeast Regional College. Lakeland College in Lloydminster is not a regional college, but rather a bi-provincial college that serves students from Alberta and the northwestern part of Saskatchewan. It is administered under Alberta's provincial legislation and is authorized to deliver certificate, diploma and applied degrees from its two full-service campuses. Approximately 50 percent of students attending the Lloydminster campus and 30 percent of Lakeland's total student population are from Saskatchewan. The Government of Saskatchewan does provide Lakeland College with modest funding, approximately $1 million annually, for programs and services offered to Saskatchewan students, but this support pales in comparison to the over $30 million that comes to the college from the province of Alberta.

The regional colleges' mandate is to provide educational services and programs that fall within four broad areas: adult basic education, vocational/technical training, university courses and non-credit programming. The colleges provide a variety of career and student support

services to assist students' successful program completion. Over 23,000 learners currently access regional colleges each year, making it a significant point of contact for those seeking advice and opportunities in the province's post-secondary education system. Of course, unlike Lakeland College, many of the courses taken in the regional colleges actually originate with either SIAST or the province's two universities.

1.2 The Overarching Theme

While the *Regional Colleges Act* does not use this terminology, it is clear that two principles govern the "system": *territoriality* and *hierarchy*. It is our contention that both of these principles need to be revisited and reconceived if the system is to evolve in a way that provides efficient and effective programming for students.

The very term "regional college" implies that each college should consider, first and foremost, the needs of those who reside within its boundaries. *Territoriality*, or a territorially defined expectation, is built into the language of the *Act* (S. 4), wherein the minister has the authority to "determine the geographic area of Saskatchewan in which a regional college is to provide services…" The resulting boundaries are, in some cases, natural division points within the province. However, when colleges consolidate, as occurs occasionally, the boundaries expand placing some pressure on the concept of "region" as conventionally understood.

More important, the term "regional" has come to mean "territorial" in the sense that programming in a defined geographical area is reserved for one college only; all others are discouraged from trespassing. A division of labour along territorial lines is a common and typically useful way of building responsiveness to local needs. It is not, however, the only way to specialize. Functional specialization—the creation of human and physical capital devoted to particular tasks—is an equally legitimate way of achieving efficiency (Simon 1997: 30). As the regional college system moves forward, serious consideration should be given as to whether or not the current division of labour is adequate to meet the new challenges of administrative efficiency and effectiveness.

There are two aspects of *hierarchy* that deserve comment. First, the regional college regulations make reference to the "brokering" of courses created by other educational providers. Ministerial correspondence and program regulations make it clear that regional colleges are to be primarily the organizers of educational opportunities and not the creators. The creators are the province's two universities and SIAST. The colleges act as brokers for trades and apprenticeship courses that SIAST has developed and sponsors, and provide local settings for courses developed and delivered by the universities.

This system has much to recommend it, as we will point out below, but the regional colleges increasingly chafe under what they regard as SIAST's tutelage. And while relations with the universities are less troubling, from a hierarchical perspective, all the prerogatives regarding delivery of degree course work rest with the senior institutions. In short, the system is designed to discourage regional college aspirations to transcend their delivery role, with the result that there is less overall innovation than is desirable.

> It would be more accurate to describe a set of colleges rather than a system of colleges.

The second element of hierarchy that merits attention is the relationship between the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration (AEEI) and the regional colleges. Again, the *Act* sets the tone. The minister is given authority to provide general direction and specific funding to the colleges, to approve capital expenditures and financial obligations, to redraw boundaries, and, *in extremis*, to take a given college under direct administrative authority. From an accountability point of view, there is nothing objectionable about any of these powers. Taken together, however, and combined with the authority to recommend board membership, they provide government with the ability to manage the affairs of the colleges. Retaining responsibility for the colleges while simultaneously encouraging their independence is just the sort of paradox that haunts modern public administration, and yet it is a sensible and constructive resolution of this paradox that is presently required.

This report will provide the necessary background to appreciate the evolving role of regional colleges in the province's higher education system. It will suggest some of the criteria against which college performance should legitimately be assessed, and it will discuss the tensions that the *hierarchy* and *territoriality* principles generate when they are applied in a rapidly changing environment.

Above all, this report will argue that the regional colleges do not, in fact, constitute a system at all. Put another way, it would be more accurate to describe a *set* of colleges

rather than a *system* of colleges. System implies high levels of strategizing and collaboration to meet goals defined at the provincial level. Recent developments, many of them at the behest of the colleges, are encouraging but most relationships are bilateral between the ministry and individual colleges.

The regional colleges represent a resource for the province of Saskatchewan that needs to be deployed in a more effective manner. The report will highlight instances of innovative programming and innovative thinking at the regional college level, and it will encourage government to facilitate these developments by redefining and, in some cases, relaxing the *hierarchy* and *territoriality* principles discussed above. The report will not recommend that government withdraw oversight or reduce involvement in the regional colleges. On the contrary, the system's current ailments can be traced, to a significant extent, to the absence of sufficient policy direction from the centre. But government should not aim to provide micro direction to the colleges or manage them through the enforcement of program requirements. The colleges should be treated as partners in a bigger enterprise than the one currently conceived, and the ministry is well positioned to lead in this endeavor and in so doing create a genuine regional college system.

1.3 The Review Process

The analysis contained in this report, and the conclusions it embodies, are the direct result of extensive consultations with the regional college community itself, with government officials, with other post-secondary institutions, and with officials in other jurisdictions (for a complete list see www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca). No claim is made that our consultations have been exhaustive, but we have listened to a wide variety of voices on diverse topics including accountability, financial arrangements, governance, strategic planning and budgeting. This report is not organized to discuss each one of these topics, but they run throughout the text and constitute the informational base on which our recommendations ultimately rest.

In September 2010, the review committee began its work by developing a work plan, undertaking a documentary analysis, establishing an evaluation framework, conducting interviews and consulting with colleges and key stakeholders. In addition, the committee set up a website to provide up-to-date information on the progress of the review. On September 23rd 2010, Michael Atkinson, as chair of the review, attended a meeting of the Council of Regional College CEOs at Great Plains College in Warman, Saskatchewan to discuss the process. He followed up with a letter to each of the CEOs, outlining the review's purpose, objectives and mandate. During the months of November, December and January, Dr. Atkinson and Professor Kathleen McNutt, visited each of the regional colleges and met with community partners.

To help prepare the review panel for their meetings, overviews were created for each of the regional colleges. Similar overviews were also created for Lakeland College, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, Gabriel Dumont Institute, and the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission. An e-scan provided background data and traced the evolution of Saskatchewan's regional colleges. The analysis touched on previous regional college reviews and annual reports, reviewed existing legislation and referenced questions in the Legislature, in committee testimony, editorials and expert reports.

The consultation process focused on three major themes: accountability, relationships and strategic positioning. Each of the colleges was asked to submit in writing programming data concerning institutional relationships and current programs. The colleges were extremely responsive to requests. Many prepared written responses to the initial questions, and all provided additional information as requested. The review panel received excellent cooperation and superb hospitality from all concerned.

2.0 THE SHIFTING **CONTEXT**

It is estimated that two thirds of the new openings in the labour market over the coming years will require post-secondary education and training. Today less than 50 percent of the workforce has some kind of post-secondary education. The education and training system will be under pressure to provide new/renewed trained (sic) workers for the labour force. With current institutions functioning at or near capacity, new and innovative strategies will need to be implemented to ensure that there are relevant and accessible programs to supply skilled workers to support [Saskatchewan's] economy.

- Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2005

Saskatchewan's regional colleges were created to improve the quality of rural life and increase the accessibility of education and training opportunities across a dispersed population. Since 1976, enrollments have more than doubled, and program offerings have expanded to meet student needs. But the colleges are at a critical juncture. The forces of globalization and information communication have rendered regional and national boundaries much less relevant today than they were 40 years go. Post-secondary institutions everywhere are being challenged to reconsider their programs and delivery systems. This is a particular challenge for the regional colleges, restricted as they are to providing programs from other sources to students in a particular geographical area.

Globalization's impact takes the form of an increasingly interconnected higher education system, new information and communications technologies (ICT) and the shift to a knowledge economy (Altbach 2009). Globalization provides new opportunities for learners, including the possibility of study outside national boundaries, increased social mobility and increased innovation (Power 2000). As higher education evolves, the impact on regional colleges will be significant. They will undoubtedly face increased competition among providers and increased availability of choice for students.

The geographic boundaries that demarcate the regional colleges' territories are of reduced significance in this borderless world (Murphy 2002; Newman 2006). The traditional role of colleges in the province will have to be reexamined in the context of these contemporary dynamics (Myers 2007). That process is already underway in other post-secondary systems. Institutional responses to external pressures have generated a search for modern managerial tools that support innovation and quality through accountability mechanisms and performance-based resource systems.

NORTHERN HEALTH **HUMAN RESOURCE STRATEGY**

In the North, the challenge of recruiting and retaining health care professionals is met by forging a multi-stakeholder coalition led by **Northlands College**. In partnership with provincial and First Nations health authorities, tribal councils, federal and provincial governments and post-secondary institutions, Northlands has developed a five-year, $12 million Northern Health Human Resource Strategy (2010-2015) focused on increasing the number of nurses, mental health and addictions counselors and community health workers practicing in the North. An important part of the strategy is the development of a BSc Nursing program with the University of Saskatchewan, the first partnership of its kind with a regional college.

2.1 External Pressures

Globalization has produced a global–local dichotomy that is being felt across North America (Bailey 2002; Levin 2001). Regional colleges remain attuned to the needs of local communities, industries and learners, but online learning, international migration and a rapidly evolving provincial economy oblige colleges to rethink their traditional role as territorial wardens. In the new environment of post-secondary education, where innovation, flexibility and responsiveness are increasingly valuable assets, colleges need to redefine themselves as regional stewards, attending to local needs by becoming, at the very least, provincial players. Consider just some of the forces pushing all post-secondary institutions to rethink their role.

2.1.1 The Internet Society

The Internet revolution has fundamentally altered human society and learning processes (Snyder et al 2003; Zuurmond 2005). In Canada, where geography often acts as a barrier to participation, post-secondary educational providers have become world leaders in distance education, increasing access for equity groups. For Aboriginal students, for example, distance learning has broken significant barriers to post-secondary education, with 18 percent of young adults (20-34) participating in some form of online post-secondary education (Council of Ministers of Education, 2010). Athabasca University, which specializes in distance learning, doubled its enrollment between 2002-2008 to 32,000 students (Status of E-Learning 2009).

The appeal of e-learning and other forms of technology-enhanced distance education lies in its ability to accommodate the needs of a wide variety of learners. E-learning has been particularly effective in literacy and essential skills training (Status of Learning 2010). Both adults and younger students can retrain and upgrade their education without giving up jobs or moving to larger centres. The appeal in Saskatchewan is obvious. Nationally, 19 percent of the population lives beyond 80 km of a

TABLE 2.1: Saskatchewan's Portion of National Immigration. Permanent Residents.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
SK	1,882	1,704	1,667	1,668	1,943	2,119	2,724	3,516	4,835	6,890
Canada	227,455	250,640	229,049	221,348	235,825	262,241	251,642	236,754	247,247	252,179
	0.83%	0.68%	0.73%	0.75%	0.82%	0.81%	1.08%	1.49%	1.96%	2.73%

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2009)

straight-line distance from a post-secondary institution, while 13 percent live 40-80 km away. In Saskatchewan, however, distances are greater. More than 50 percent of the population lives over 80 km from a university (Frenette 2002). Regional colleges are beginning to respond, but they are far from being leaders in this process. And while they are often closer to learners, in spatial terms, than other institutions, they are still remote for many. As colleges face growing competition for learning opportunities, they will be obliged to consider a larger investment in online programming to address leaner's demands for accessibility and flexibility.

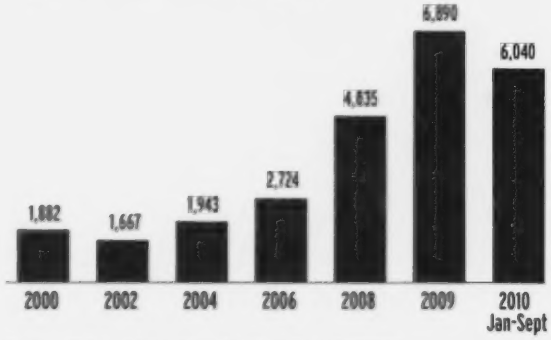
2.1.2 Student Mobility

Globalization has also led to increased student mobility. As of 2007, more than 2.5 million students were studying outside their home countries. Studies estimate that 7 million international students will be studying abroad by 2020 (OECD 2006). Saskatchewan's economy, higher education institutions and students stand to benefit enormously from the internationalization of education. Some of these benefits will include a better educational experience for students, increased diversification of faculty and curriculum, the attraction and retention of skilled workers and additional post-secondary revenues (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2010; Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade 2009; Kaznowska and Usher 2011).

Saskatchewan is also experiencing population growth through immigration (Elliot 2009). Immigration is one of the main responses to the labour shortage and the government is committed to settling a higher number of skilled and experienced immigrants. Recent immigrants to Saskatchewan accounted for nearly one half of the employment growth in the past two years. While the absolute numbers are still low, they are increasing rapidly (Table 2.1). From 2008 to 2010, employment among recent immigrants nearly doubled from 7,300 to 13,600 (Elliot 2009). The provincial government has targeted 3,400 nominations through the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program for 2010-11, which will result in approximately 10,000 newcomers to Saskatchewan this year (AEEI 2010a).

While migration flows into the province are concentrated in the urban centers, there have been a significant number of new immigrants moving to rural areas. As discussed in Section 4, regional colleges have responded by offering English for employment training and in some cases establishing settlement services. There are acute challenges associated with filling the labour force supply gap using immigration. First, competition for international talents among OECD members is intense, making it difficult to attract skilled newcomers (OECD 2006). Second, problems have arisen over the recognition of foreign credentials and concerns that "the current immigration criteria tend to favour those with strong academic credentials over those with skilled trades" (McMurdy and Rajasekaran 2008, 8). Other common problems such as language barriers and a mismatch of skill sets to labour market needs suggest immigration alone cannot supply the quantity of skilled people necessary to sustain economic growth (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 **Saskatchewan Immigration**



Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2009)

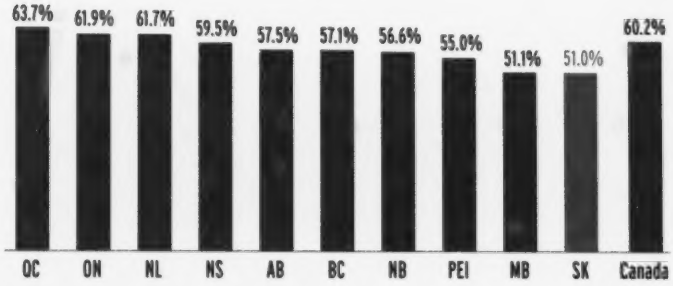
2.1.3 Changing Occupational Mosaic

Canada's transition to a knowledge-based economy means that more jobs than ever require post-secondary education. The proximate cause is the changing shape of demand in labour markets. Occupations that require non-routine analytic and interactive tasks have grown substantially during the last four decades. By contrast, those occupations requiring routine cognitive and manual tasks have declined substantially. Computer-induced changes in the workplace are a large part of the equation. Whatever the reasons, the impact on the growth of jobs requiring college education is substantial. As one set of authors (Autor et. al. 2003: 1322) put it "The pervasiveness of these shifts suggests to us that changes in job task content—spurred by technological change—may plausibly be viewed as an underlying factor contributing to recent demand shifts favoring educated labor."

Saskatchewan is experiencing record levels of participation in the labour market, with 70.2 percent of adults in 2010 either working or looking for work. Despite the global recession, employment in Saskatchewan increased by 1.1 percent in 2010, the ninth straight year of increases (in which Saskatchewan averaged an annual increase of 1.6 percent) but the slowest growth since 2005 (Elliot 2009). From 2009 to 2010, nine of 16 industry groups saw employment growth led by the resource sector (7.8 percent), manufacturing (6.9 percent), and professional and technical services (6.4 percent). Six of the 16 industries saw declines in employment, led by public administration (-7.5 percent), agriculture (-3.7 percent) and retail trade (-2.7 percent) (Elliot 2009). Skilled trades will be an important part of Saskatchewan's economic competitiveness, and with current labour supply shortages in many trades, new strategies must be developed to accommodate these labour market gaps (AEEI and SATCC 2009).

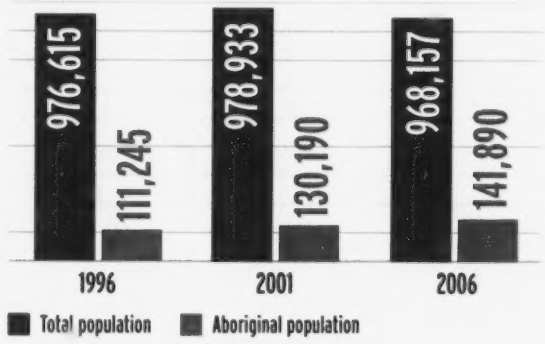
Despite Saskatchewan's high levels of labour market participation, the province has fallen behind in terms of educational attainment. As Figure 2.2 demonstrates, Saskatchewan is performing below the national average of 60.2 percent of post-secondary graduates as a percentage of employment, with only 51 percent of those currently in the provincial labour force having graduated from a post-secondary institution. Ranked tenth among the provinces on this key innovation and growth indictor, Saskatchewan has some work to do in developing the province's human capital. As Enterprise Saskatchewan (2010) explains "an indicator based on all post-secondary graduates encompasses not only university graduates (who are generally recognized as key to knowledge-based economies) but also graduates with trade certification. Skilled trades account for a significant portion of the labour shortages experienced in Saskatchewan, and increasing the number of post-secondary graduates in all areas is vital to Saskatchewan's continued prosperity" (21).

Figure 2.2 **Post-Secondary Graduates as a Percentage of Employment -2009**



Source: Saskatchewan Enterprise (2010)

Figure 2.3 **Saskatchewan's Portion of Aboriginals as Compared to the Provincial Population**



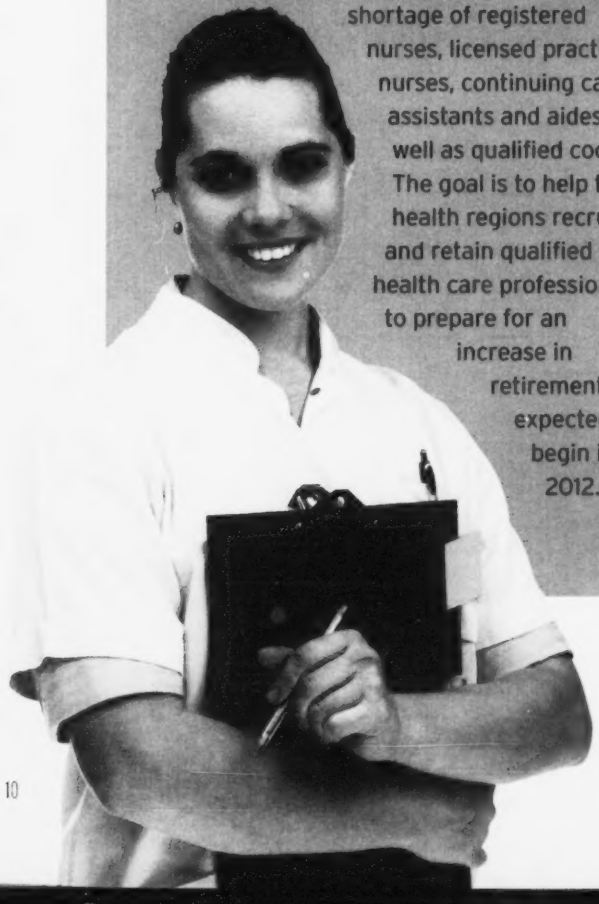
Source: Statistics Canada (2006)

Compared to the rest of Canada, Saskatchewan has a high percentage of Aboriginal people who have traditionally been underemployed or employed in low skill jobs requiring little formal education. Aboriginal employment in Saskatchewan has been largely consistent since 2007; however, Aboriginal statistics only report those living off

NURSING **PARTNERSHIPS**

The continuing education needs of Saskatchewan's nurses provide an excellent opportunity for collaboration between the health regions and the regional colleges. In 2010, Kelsey Trail Health Region approached **Cumberland College** about the possibility of offering a Master of Nursing - Nurse Practitioner program within the region. The master's program will be offered by the University of Saskatchewan beginning in 2011-12, with the option of offering the program on a part-time basis to nurses employed by Kelsey Trail Health Region still being explored.

In the southwest, **Great Plains College** has recently formed partnerships with Heartland and Cypress Health Regions to address professional upgrading of health care professionals and support staff. Both health regions are facing a shortage of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, continuing care assistants and aides, as well as qualified cooks. The goal is to help the health regions recruit and retain qualified health care professionals to prepare for an increase in retirements expected to begin in 2012.



reserve who self-identify as Aboriginal. The number of Aboriginals living off reserve has continued to increase faster than employment, resulting in an employment rate decline from 59.6 per cent in 2007 to 56 percent in 2010 (Elliot 2009). Yet the rapid growth of the Aboriginal population, as shown in Figure 2.3, has significantly outpaced the population growth rate of the rest of Saskatchewan, with the share of the Aboriginal labour force expected to reach 28 percent by 2026. Ensuring improved rates of Aboriginal educational attachment and increased rates of employment will positively impact the labour force and contribute significantly to economic growth (Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics 2008; Sharpe et. al. 2009).

In spite of low levels of labour market attachment and educational attainment rates, educational outcomes for Aboriginals have improved (AEEL 2010). For example, in 2005 educational outcomes for Aboriginals 15 years and older increased from 29.7 percent to 32.1 percent (AEEL 2010). Those with a university degree grew from 6.8 percent of the Aboriginal population in 2005 to 8.8 percent in 2009 (Elliot 2009). Still young Aboriginals continue to have low educational participation and attainment rates compared to the non-Aboriginal population. Education continues to be the best tool to overcome the employment gap. Despite increases in Aboriginal employment—from 42 percent to 46 percent between 2001 and 2006—there is still a 21 percent point gap between the employment of non-Aboriginals (67 percent) and Aboriginals (46 percent) (Elliot 2009). When adjustments are made for differences in education, there is almost no difference between the employment of Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals.

2.1.4 Competition Among Educational Providers

Increased competition from alternative educational providers is supplying students with a wide variety of choice. Post-secondary opportunities have exploded with virtual universities, distance learning and other forms of technologically-enhanced learning. There has also been growth in the number of private providers, with 30 percent of global enrolment in private institutions. Private institutions offer access to students who might not be qualified for public institutions and help offset overcrowding in the public system. However, private institutions in general are seen as less prestigious as they are perceived to serve a mass clientele (Altbach et. al. 2009). Regional colleges have advantages in this competition, but they need to consider the needs of students, which may involve education and employment beyond college boundaries.

2.2 Institutional Responses

In Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions are responding to the changing environment. Strategic planning and quality control are now key drivers of decision-making and business-tested managerial tools are being introduced in an attempt to create a responsive system capable of aligning supply and demand. Governments have, if anything, been even more aggressive, creating accountability frameworks and introducing quality assurance measures.

2.2.1 Accountability Frameworks

In the past, accountability was based almost entirely on compliance with statutory authority and accounting procedures developed for financial reporting. This approach was based on the management of activities and did not measure actual outcomes, making it difficult to assess whether higher education institutions were responding to learners' needs or were aligned with government's social and economic development goals. In their new format, accountability frameworks are increasingly based on the goals of a post-secondary education system. Strategic planning, needs assessments, business planning and performance reporting mechanisms are now common means of improving fiscal responsibility and promoting openness and transparency (Fisher et al. 2008; Alberta 2007). We have more to say about regional colleges' experience with these kinds of tools in Section 4.

Note that whether intended or not accountability frameworks encourage system-wide collaboration and integration (Alberta 2007). And as publicly funded post-secondary institutions are increasingly obliged to report on issues such as human rights protection, freedom of information and protection of privacy (Shanahan and Jones 2007), they are drawn into a new pattern of converging expectations.

2.2.2 Quality Assurance

The worldwide move towards quality assurance in products and processes has extended emphatically to higher education. Publications such as *MacLean's* magazine and the *Globe and Mail* in Canada, the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* in the UK, and *USA News* and *World Report* in the US have brought the world of rankings to academic administrators. Today all post-secondary institutions, both public and private, are under intense scrutiny as national and international ranking systems purport to assess and compare institutions.

This broad trend towards measuring institutional quality has been accompanied (or perhaps has followed) by an equally intense trend towards the internal evaluation of programs. Most provinces have constructed committees that oversee this process. Sometimes the evaluation is focused on the content of curriculum and the accomplishments of faculty; other times it is focused on process to ensure that post-secondary education providers are constantly evaluating and improving. It is not too much to say that no institution of higher learning in Canada can exist, let alone thrive, without a robust quality assessment process. If current trends are any indication, post-secondary institutions will spend more time explaining what they do and why,to a growing list of stakeholders and interest groups.

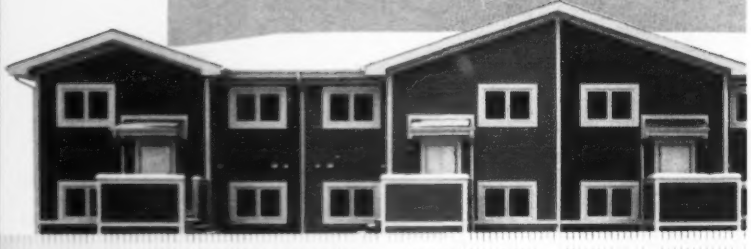
A number of Canadian provinces have recently created external quality assurance boards to review applications from post-secondary institutions seeking to offer new degrees. The creation of these agencies was partially motivated by the growth in for-profit private institutions seeking degree-granting status. In that regard, there is general support among all the provinces for The Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance of Degree Education in Canada, which attempts to make degree standards more consistent across the country.

Ontario. Two councils review the quality of post-secondary programs in the province. The Post-secondary Education Quality Assessment Board was established through the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act*, 2000. The board has a mandate to assess new post-secondary programs for the minister's consent, perform quality assessments and conduct organizational reviews, as well as other research the minister refers to the board. The second council was the result of recommendations of the provincial review of post-secondary education in 2005 that proposed an independent council on higher education to coordinate research, establish targets and evaluate the performance and outcomes of higher education in Ontario (Rae 2005). The council was established in 2005 through the *Higher Education Quality Council* of Ontario Act, 2005.

Alberta. The Campus Alberta Quality Council was established under the terms of the *Post-secondary Learning Act*, 2003. The council has a mandate to ensure quality post-secondary degree programs and to make recommendations to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology on applications from post-secondary institutions seeking to offer new degree programs in

STUDENT **RESIDENCES**

The lack of available and affordable student housing in Saskatchewan has become a barrier to success for some Saskatchewan learners. In one of the first and most extensive efforts by a college to address this challenge, **North West Regional College** has recently completed three new townhouses at its Meadow Lake campus. These townhouses will accommodate 94 students and family members in 40 furnished, individual suites. The project was made possible by accessing the Government of Canada's Knowledge Infrastructure Program and the Community Adjustment Fund (CAF). The Government of Saskatchewan provided $3.1 million from the Community Development Trust Fund, and the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation contributed $1.45 million towards the project. North West's initiative will help alleviate a shortage of affordable student housing in Meadow Lake and help draw learners to the region.



Alberta. The council ensures that degree programs in Alberta are recognized both nationally and internationally.

British Columbia. British Columbia (BC) has created a Degree Quality Assessment Board, which reviews and makes recommendations to the Minister of Regional Economic and Skills Development on applications for new degree programs and exempt status submitted by BC's public and private post-secondary institutions and by out-of-province public post-secondary institutions.

Maritime Provinces. Working in collaboration, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have created the Maritime Provinces' Higher Education Commission whose mandate is to develop policies on quality assurance that will impact the activities of all degree-granting institutions.

2.2.3 Strategic Plans

Closely connected to the trend towards quality assurance is the almost universal embrace of strategic planning. Boards of Governors now insist on robust planning processes in which they are somehow engaged. The development of clear goals, operational objectives and accompanying metrics has become an integral part of academic life in Canada. Offices have been created to manage this process and to merge environmental scans, quality assessments and new initiatives into coherent planning documents. In advanced cases, budgetary commitments, both capital and operational, are a key part of an integrated planning process.

It is inconceivable that any post-secondary institution will be able to avoid the creation of processes that bring faculty, students, staff, board members, stakeholders and administrators together to plan the institution's future. Attempts to cut short these processes by senior leadership are fraught with dangers.

2.2.4 Performance Based Budgeting

Governments struggling with financing the increasing costs of post-secondary education have responded with performance-based budgeting. New Zealand, for example, has reinvented the method of funding tertiary education by embracing a market-based strategy with an emphasis on exchange of contracts that define clear goals and anticipated outcomes. These performance-based exchanges depend primarily on defining what the system should produce. According to the most recent policy framework

published by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, "monitoring and evaluating" play an important role in funding and essentially "steer" the outcomes of tertiary education (Ministry of Education 2009, 23).

Academics have been critical of performance-based funding, claiming that it destroys academic freedom and makes them, "[p]romoters of government policy and business aims" (Parliamentary Library Social Policy 2003, 12). Whatever the validity of that argument, it has not discouraged others from following New Zealand's lead. Australia has also increased performance based funding based on teacher quality and student completion rates (Ministry of Education 2009, 28).

2.2.5 Clarifying Mandates

Finally, provincial governments have become increasingly conscious of the differences among post-secondary providers and the need to establish some mandate clarity. The result is increasing interest in policy frameworks that categorize institutions on the basis of the character and extent of their missions. Alberta, for example, has developed a six-sector model (comprehensive academic and research institutions, baccalaureate and applied studies institutions, polytechnic institutions, comprehensive community institutions, independent academic institutions, and specialized arts and culture institutions) that clarifies the contribution of each provider in its post-secondary system.

Regional colleges have not, by and large, made a thorough assessment of their medium or long-term prospects in the face of these new challenges.

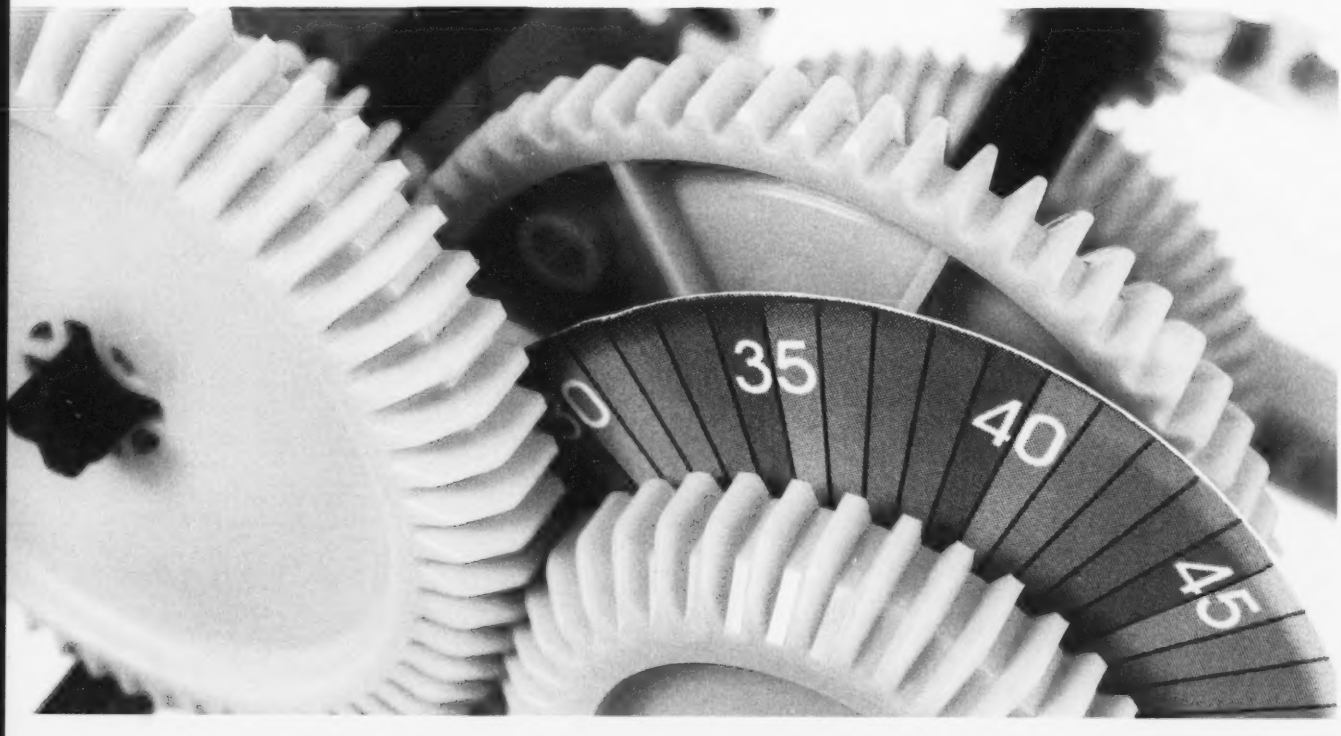
Mandate reviews are often conducted in the context of policy objectives. The recent Alberta review (2007) notes that the province has the third lowest educational participation rate in the country and emphasizes the need to increase participation among underrepresented groups. British Columbia's 2006/2007 *Campus 2020: Thinking Ahead* review found that BC was falling behind other provinces in post-secondary participation and credentials earned; it set ambitious goals to become a national leader in advanced education. Finally, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador conducted a review of the post-secondary system in 2004/2005. In keeping with the themes discussed here, the review prioritizes adult learning recommending the development of adult basic education courses not only through part-time classes, but also through web-based Internet delivery. All of these reports recognize that post-secondary education is not simply a direct contributor to the economy but a means of advancing social goals, something that regional colleges have traditionally insisted on.

2.3 Does it Matter?

Should colleges care about the shifting context described here? Perhaps too much is made of these changes. Economic depressions and international disasters may slow down globalization forces and the increasing cost of higher education may blunt demand. Perhaps the new occupational mosaic will never emerge and governments will lose their appetite for accountability measures. Certainly there are many who decry the adoption of business tools by post-secondary institutions and deeply regret the juggernaut of performance indicators. They argue that the mission of colleges and universities to generate and disseminate knowledge does not lend itself to managerial exercises or to the adoption of technological fixes for pedagogical problems.

Regional colleges could take the view that these skeptics are correct in their assessment and that the trends identified here will somehow blow over. We detected no such inclination during our discussion. On the other hand, we detected no sense of urgency either. Regional colleges have not, by and large, made a thorough assessment of their medium or long-term prospects in the face of these new challenges. Their focus has been on the short run, and they have responded well to both demands and incentives. That pattern of change appears to be changing itself. Section 4 suggests that the growing demand for efficiency and effectiveness has prompted college leaders to consider different approaches to the context described here. Denial isn't one of them. The colleges are becoming more innovative and more attentive to accountability requirements. The final parts of the report suggest ways of moving forward even faster.

3.0 SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL COLLEGES: **NOT QUITE A "SYSTEM"**



The Saskatchewan regional colleges currently do not constitute a coordinated system. The absence of a shared vision among the colleges and the lack of clarity surrounding their role in the provincial post-secondary sector discourage collaboration and the creation of a singular identity. Although a few colleges do share information and partner with one another on marketing and technology enhanced learning (Myers 2007), programming initiatives are generally rationalized around regional needs. Regional colleges have significant knowledge advantages within their geographic areas and are very responsive to local economic and labour conditions. These conditions are different across the province. Some colleges concentrate on serving increased demand from industry, while others serve populations with serious literacy barriers. As a result, they are becoming increasingly distinctive in terms of emphasis and capabilities.

3.1 Enrolments and Programs

Saskatchewan's regional colleges have a mandate to broker, manage and deliver credit training from other accredited institutions. The colleges identify local training needs for their geographic region and coordinate programming that ranges from adult basic education (literacy and adult upgrading, referred to as ABE), to technical skills training and university courses, to customized non-credit and contract training with business and industry.

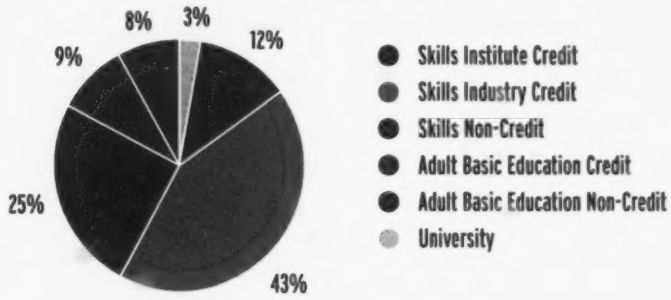
Taken together the regional colleges served over 22,000 learners in 2009-2010: 4,500 ABE students, 630 students in university education and over 17,000 enrolled in skills training. Since the 2005 regional colleges review, collective enrolment numbers have grown by only 1.1 percent. As Figures 3.1 and 3.2 show, the distribution of aggregate enrollments across programs has changed relatively little as well. Note, however, that enrolments mean different things depending on the program involved. Industry skills programming, which makes up the largest proportion of the colleges' collective efforts, typically consists of short courses where the commitment is measured in weeks. SIAST and university courses, by contrast, are longer in duration and involve much more commitment to supervision and evaluation.

It should also be noted that data reliability issues place limitations on generating accurate portrayals of the regional colleges. While there is agreement between colleges and the ministry regarding data definitions, there are inconsistencies in data collection and reporting such that valid comparisons cannot always be made among the colleges and between colleges and SIAST. For instance, annual report tables contain full-time and part-time student enrolments, as well as full load equivalent numbers (FLE). FLE calculations are drawn from the Student Information System (SIS), and SIAST has its own calculation for FLEs. Although the data used here were gathered from a variety of sources, there is a heavy reliance on data generated by the colleges themselves.

Notwithstanding data limitations there are some discernible patterns. For example, compared with the universities, which enroll over 25,000 undergraduate students, the regional colleges are only peripherally involved in the education of degree-destined students. This picture has not changed much over the past five years, nor have the courses normally offered. Institute credit programming (SIAST and similarly brokered programming) has also stabilized, while ABE has grown modestly. Non-credit programming for skills has declined, while programming for skills industry credit has seen the most growth, likely because some non-credit programming now qualifies for industry credit.

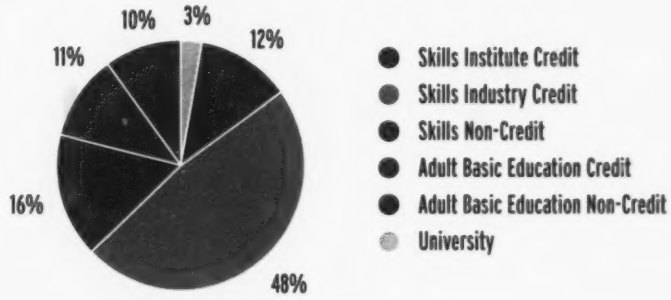
What is striking about these figures is the relative importance of industry programming in terms of contact with students. The regional colleges have developed an extensive capacity to respond to industry-based training needs with industry-certified training offered at every college. This category includes occupational health and safety training as well as training to work in confined spaces, but also standardized knowledge applications. The colleges have formed a number of educational partnerships with major industry players including IBM, the Canadian Institute of Financial Planners, Microsoft and so forth. The growth of this programming is consistent with the colleges' declared intention to seek out and serve the interests of local industry. The main difference between institute- and industry- certified training is that the latter is typically short term and does not require the approval of such credit granting institutions as SIAST or the two universities. This type of training is normally done on a full cost recovery basis and is a growing business for most colleges.

Figure 3.1 **2005 - 2006 Regional College Aggregate Enrolment**



Source: Regional College Annual Reports (2006)

Figure 3.2 **2009 - 2010 Regional College Aggregate Enrolment**

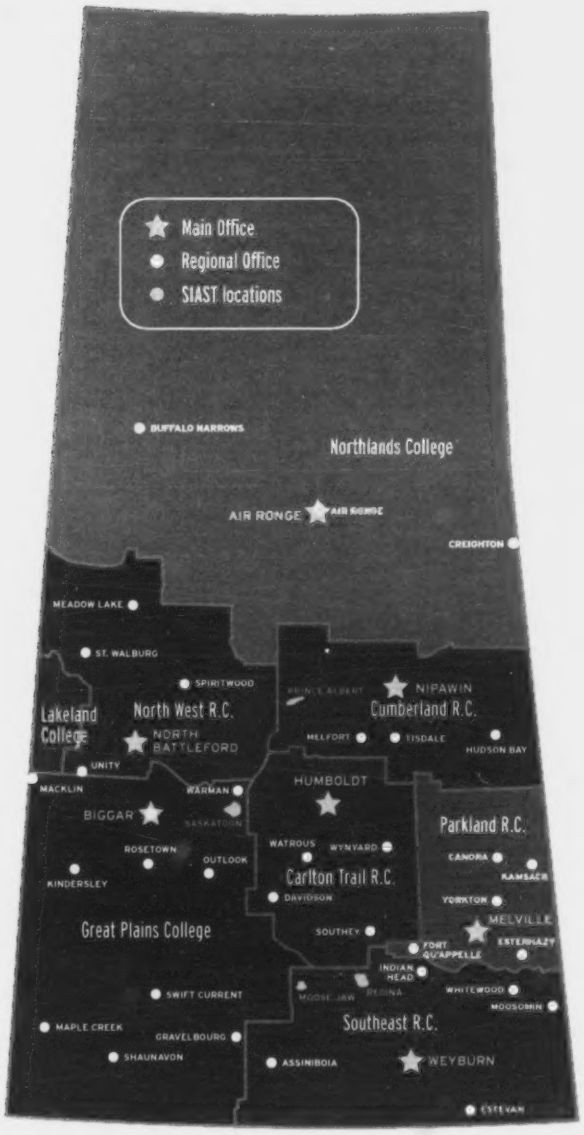


Source: Regional College Annual Reports (2010)

3.2 Increasing Diversity?

While the aggregate picture of student enrolment and college programming has not changed much over the past several years, there have been changes at the college level that reflect increasingly different circumstances encountered around the province. The North, for example, is unique in covering a vast geographic area with a large Aboriginal population and an economy heavily reliant on resource extraction (see figure 3.3). The needs are different in the agricultural and oil and gas regions of the province. Regional labour market conditions are also uneven, with some regions experiencing more acute labour shortages than others (AEEI and SATCC 2010). For example, in the southeastern areas of the province, strong oil and gas activity has lead to shortages of workers in related trades. Whereas, in the North there is a shortage across virtually all trades.

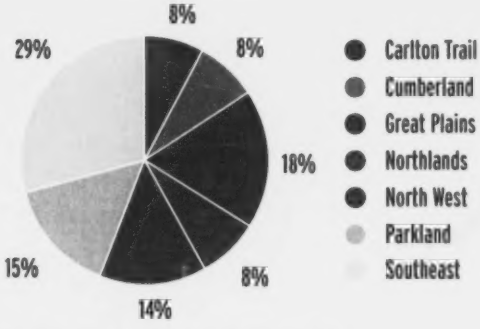
Figure 3.3 **Saskatchewan Regional Colleges, Regions and Offices (2008-2009)**



It is worth observing that along with changing economic and environmental conditions some colleges have grown in terms of absolute enrolments while others have declined. Again, the nature of enrolments must be taken into account, but at Southeast Regional College and Parkland Regional College enrolments have increased by over 1,000 since 2005, while Cumberland and North West have seen the largest proportional increases. Carlton Trail shows the largest decline, almost 25 percent, off an already small base. The result is that some colleges are considerably larger than others in terms of enrolment figures (with all the caveats required to interpret them). Is there an optimal size for colleges relative to their geographic and economic base? These figures provide a starting place for considering what a system of colleges might look like in geographic and demographic terms.

The brief profiles of the provinces' colleges presented below are intended to illustrate difference in enrolment and programming choices. One-to-one comparisons should be made with caution. A host of factors influence each college's particular shape and they cannot all be captured in a brief summary. And once again, the colleges have their own ways of categorizing expenditures, which means there is

Figure 3.4 **2009 - 2010 Regional College Enrolment by Institution**



Source: Regional College Annual Reports (2010)

no guarantee of consistency. It is still possible to observe, however, that the colleges differ on a number of dimensions and these differences appear to be more pronounced than they were five years ago.

3.2.1 Carlton Trail

Carlton Trail Regional College serves a population of approximately 65,500 with three percent living on First Nation reserves. Humboldt, with a population of about 5,000, is the region's only city, but there are a number of towns in which programming has been offered, sometimes on a sporadic basis.

Carlton Trail has focused its programming on skills training with 83 percent of student enrolments in this area (Figure 3.4). The skills training programming caters to the region's relatively high levels of manufacturing and mining (potash). ABE enrolments are lower than at other colleges, and university programming is nominal, presumably because of the college's proximity to St. Peter's College, which has been affiliated with the University of Saskatchewan since 1926. While adult basic education has a larger share of the college's enrolment than it did in 2005, the number of ABE enrolments trails that of other colleges.

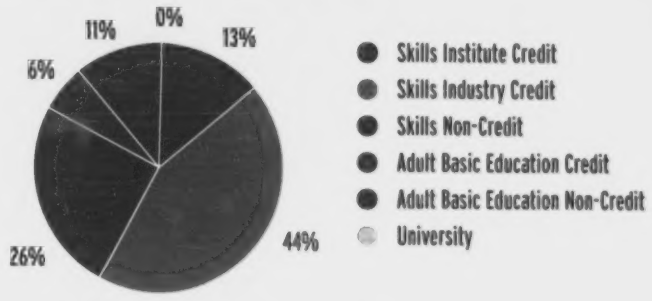
In 2010, the bulk of Carlton Trail's budget, which is the smallest of all the colleges, came from the provincial government, with tuition covering 13 percent and federal funding covering nine percent (Figure 3.5). Carlton Trail's revenue from contracts is low relative to that of other colleges.

3.2.2 Cumberland

Cumberland College serves an area of about 34,500 square kilometres and a population of 50,000 people, of which about 11 percent are Aboriginal. Cumberland has seen steady enrolment increases in most programming areas since 2005. Like most colleges, the majority of student enrolments are concentrated in the skills training programs. Identifying a regional need, Cumberland College has made the decision to increase funding and programming in ABE, which has resulted in substantial enrolment increases in recent years (Figure 3.7).

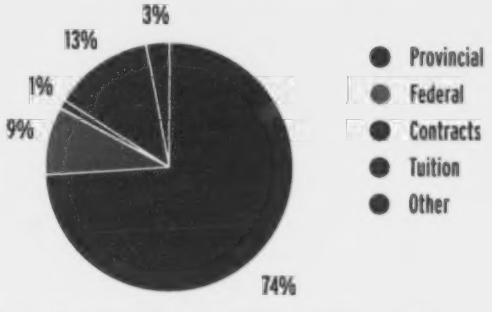
Revenues for Cumberland College come predominately from the province, as they do for all the colleges. In 2010, tuition constituted 13 percent of the college's budget, while contract revenues were at seven percent. The college also received two percent in federal funding (Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.5 **Carlton Trail 2009 - 2010 Enrolment**



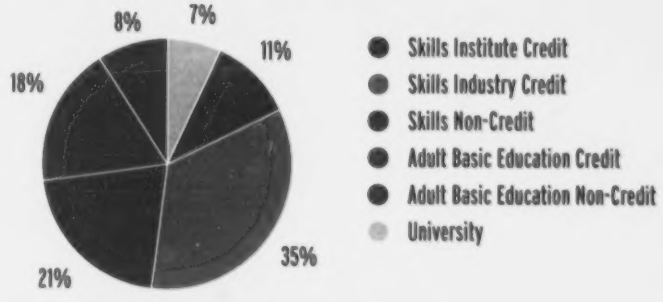
Source: Carlton Trail Regional College Annual Report (2010)

Figure 3.6 **Carlton Trail Regional College 2010 Operating Budget by Revenue Source**



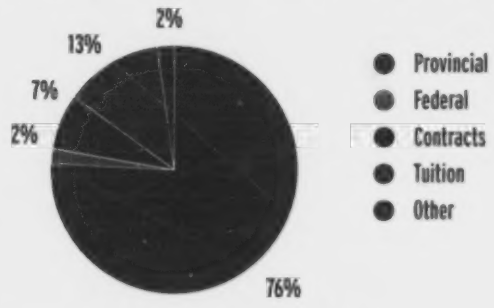
Source: Carlton Trail Regional College Annual Report (2010)

Figure 3.7 **Cumberland 2009 - 2010 Enrolment**



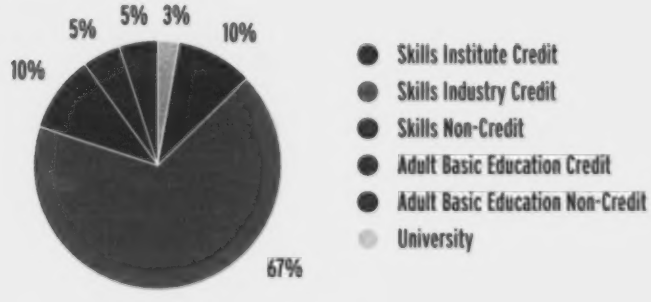
Source: Cumberland College Annual Report (2010)

Figure 3.8 **Cumberland College 2010 Operating Budget by Revenue Source**



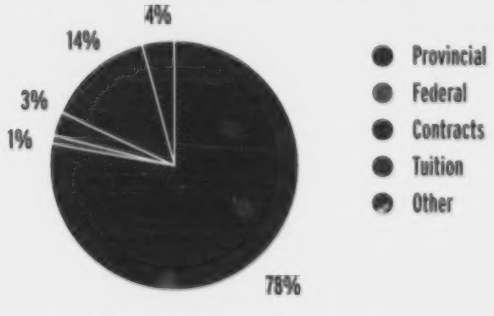
Source: Cumberland College Annual Report (2010)

Figure 3.9 **Great Plains 2009 – 2010 Enrolment**



Source: Great Plains College Annual Report (2010)

Figure 3.10 **Great Plains College 2010 Operating Budget by Revenue Source**



Source: Great Plains College Annual Report (2010)

3.2.3 Great Plains

Great Plains College was formed in July 2008 as the product of an amalgamation of Prairie West Regional College and Cypress Hills Regional College. The college's region covers more than 100,000 square kilometres with a regional population of 115,000 of which approximately three percent are Aboriginal. In addition the region is home to 50 Hutterite colonies, making up 80 percent of Saskatchewan's Hutterite community and four percent of Great Plains' regional population.

Great Plains College's programming is largely focused on skills training, with 87 percent of students enrolled in this area. As shown in Figure 3.9, industry credit skills training has increased.

In terms of the college's operating budget the main source of revenue is again the province, which provides 78 percent of funding. Contract revenues are relatively low as are federal contributions, while tuition constitutes 14 percent of the budget (Figure 3.10).

3.2.4 Northlands

Northlands College is unique inasmuch as its region covers 46 percent of Saskatchewan's land mass yet contains less than four percent of the provincial population. In the North, 86 percent of the population is Aboriginal as compared to 15 percent provincially and four percent nationally. Approximately half the region's 45,000 residents live in reserve communities in contrast to five percent of Saskatchewan's overall population. Northlands has developed numerous community and sectoral partnerships with many programs offered on reserve or in remote locations. The college also coordinates multi-party initiatives such as the delivery of mine training programs developed through the *Multi-Party Training Plan*, an agreement between the federal government, the province, Aboriginal agencies and the mining industry itself.

As can be seen in Figure 3.11, almost half of Northlands enrolments are in ABE, with the college offering significantly more non-credit ABE programming (basic literacy, employability and life skills, English-as-a-Second Language, and work-based skills) than any other college. Skills training is also a major programming focus, with 19 percent of enrollment in skills industry credit programming and 19 percent in skills institute credit programming. Northlands, along with Parklands Regional College, also has a large number of university enrollments.

Northlands operates with the largest overall budget of all the colleges, the bulk of which comes from the provincial government. Tuition covered only five percent in 2010 and no federal funding was reported (Figure 3.12). At 15 percent, Northland's revenue from contracts is the highest, proportionately, among all the colleges.

3.2.5 North West

North West Regional College's designated region encompasses a diverse industry base and large geographic area with a population of approximately 90,000 and 22 First Nation communities. The region is heavily invested in the oil and gas sector but the labour needs are diverse.

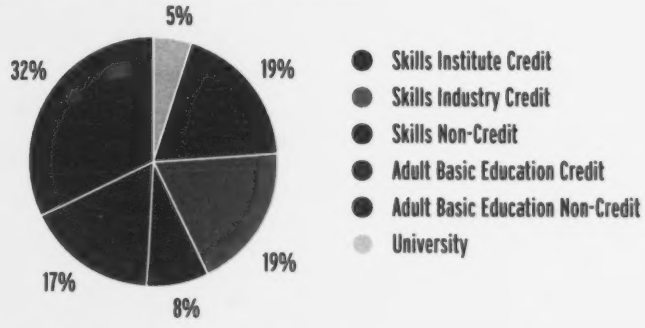
Enrolments at North West are concentrated in skills training at 66 percent: 34 percent in skills industry credit programming, 13 percent in institute credit programming and 19 percent non-credit. University programming is modest at three percent, however the college has sought to respond to regional needs by developing a partnership with the University of Regina to offer a four-year degree program in the Bachelor of Elementary Education degree at Meadow Lake Campus beginning in September 2011. As seen in Figure 3.13 enrolments in ABE are also considerable at 31 percent.

Of all the colleges North West received the highest percentage of its total funding in 2010 from the province at 79 percent (Figure 3.14). Contracts constitutes only five percent of revenue while tuition makes up 11 percent. In addition, the college had nominal income from the federal government.

3.2.6 Parkland

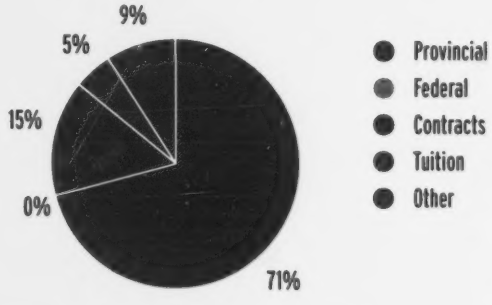
Parkland Community College serves 20,000 residents and nine First Nation communities, with an Aboriginal population of approximately 3,500. The region stands out as having a relatively high proportion of the population with less than a grade nine education and a relatively low proportion with post-secondary education. Enrolment at the college is distributed across different programming choices, reflecting a diversified regional economy characterized by farm equipment manufacturing, potash plants, ethanol plants, bio diesel plants and forestry. Parkland has the highest proportion of university enrolments and the largest in absolute terms. ABE programming is also pronounced, perhaps in response to the region's educational achievement levels.

Figure 3.11 **Northlands 2009 - 2010 Enrolment**



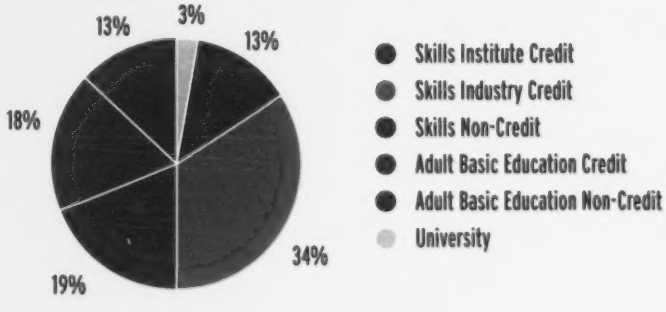
Source: Northlands College Annual Report (2010)

Figure 3.12 **Northlands College 2010 Operating Budget by Revenue Source**



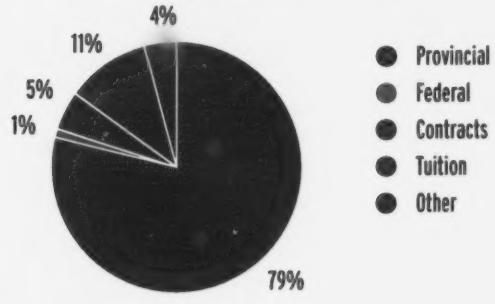
Source: Northlands College Annual Report (2010)

Figure 3.13 **North West 2009 - 2010 Enrolment**



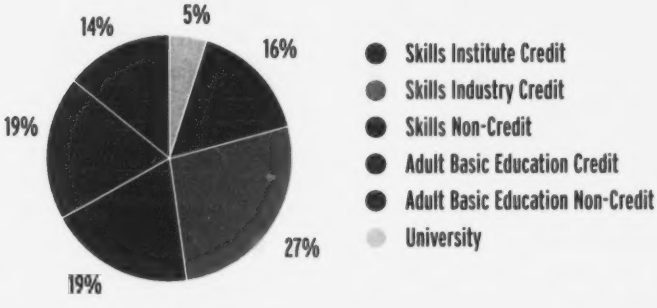
Source: North West Regional College Annual Report (2010)

Figure 3.14 **North West Regional College 2010 Operating Budget by Revenue Source**



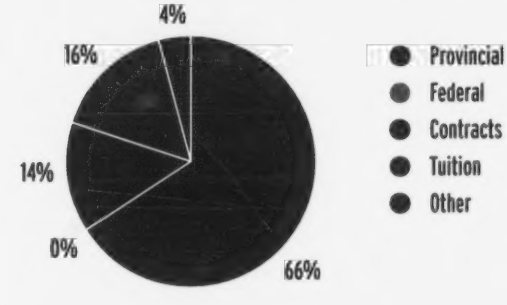
Source: North West Regional College Annual Report (2010)

Figure 3.15 **Parkland 2009 - 2010 Enrolment**



Source: Parkland College Annual Report (2010)

Figure 3.16 **Parkland College 2010 Operating Budget by Revenue Source**



Source: Parkland College Annual Report (2010)

The government funded 66 percent of Parkland's operating budget in 2010, with tuition covering 16 percent, which represents the highest tuition revenue among the colleges (Figure 3.16) and, next to Southeast, the lowest reliance on provincial funding. Parkland's revenue from contracts is also relatively high at 14 percent.

3.2.7 Southeast

Southeast Regional College's region encompasses 59,000 square kilometers and is home to 97,000 residents. The region covers over 70 communities and 10 First Nations communities. Home to Saskatchewan's Energy Training Institute, industry credit programs dominate. Seventy percent of enrolments are in this programming area (Figure 3.17), while enrolment in ABE programming makes up only six percent of the college's overall enrolment. Southeast has responded to local demands and expanded programming of both credit and non-credit programs, including additional ESL programs and on-site ABE programs in First Nations communities.

Southeast's operating budget is made up of the lowest percentage of provincial funding at 62 percent, and this college depends much more than others on tuition revenue. In 2010 contract revenues constituted six percent and no federal funding was reported (Figure 3.18).

This regional college's aggregate revenue sources were stable from 2005 to 2010. As shown in Figures 3.19 and 3.20, provincial funding constitutes the bulk of revenue, with only a two percent increase over the five-year period. Revenues from contracts only grew by one percent, while federal funding fell by one percent. Tuition revenues dropped from 14 percent to 13 percent, while other revenues also dropped a percentile.

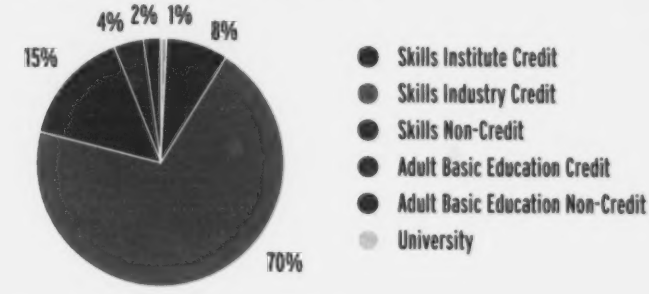
3.3 Budgets and Enrolments

The regional college picture is rounded out by a consideration of budgets. As Table 3.1 illustrates, even though college dependence on government is proportionately similar, there are significant absolute differences in students versus resources. Some, like Northlands, have relatively few students compared to the size of their overall budgets and their provincial allocations. Southeast Regional College is at the other end of the spectrum. It has the largest student population and the smallest budget from the province.

As we have emphasized throughout, the colleges face different economic challenges, serve different clients and have different opportunities for growth. That said, the overall correlation between the number of students served and the budgets available is virtually zero (0.087). This single calculation is, of course, deceptive. Not all programs cost the same, overall costs differ by region, and there are significant differences in the capacity of the colleges to strengthen their budgets by taking on educational assignments that involve small marginal costs and relatively large marginal gains. Simple comparisons are not encouraged, but a reconsideration of the rationale for budgetary allocations is overdue (see Section 6).

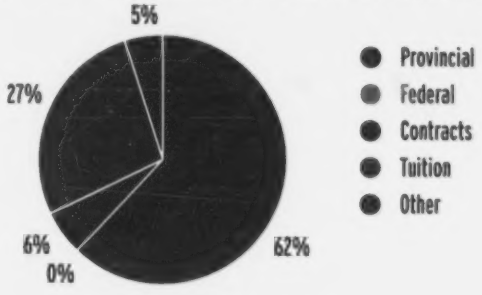
While care must be taken in interpreting budget numbers, this does not mean that efficiency and effectiveness considerations are somehow irrelevant: on the contrary. In the next section we take up the issue of how colleges might move toward a more rigorous consideration of their programming choices and their attendant costs. The point is not to force all colleges into the same budgetary and programming straightjacket, but to introduce some considerations and practices that should inform decision making at all levels and perhaps assist in creating a genuine regional college system.

Figure 3.17 **Southeast 2009 - 2010 Enrolment**



Source: Southeast College Annual Report (2010)

Figure 3.18 **Southeast College 2010 Operating Budget by Revenue Source**



Source: Southeast College Annual Report (2010)

TABLE 3.1: 2010 Operating Expenses

		General	Skills Training		Basic Education		University	Services		Total
			Credit	Non-Credit	Credit	Non-Credit	Credit	Learner Support	Counsel	
COLLEGE	Carlton Trail	$2,227,914	$1,765,544	$37,763	$386,607	$283,867	$40,000	$740,370	$230,033	$5,712,098
	Cumberland	$2,101,215	$1,130,192	$934,150	$1,257,167	$270,792	$203,546	$571,642	$213,807	$6,682,511
	Great Plains	$5,589,717	$2,472,344	$51,559	$693,967	$367,308	$105,766	$459,804	$314,685	$10,045,170
	North West	$3,751,510	$3,173,693	$361,478	$1,936,389	$314,852	$237,906	$1,034,208	$224,492	$11,034,528
	Northlands	$5,223,757	$4,093,350	$594,692	$1,764,539	$1,677,955	$375,128	$1,727,964	$905,142	$16,362,527
	Parkland	$4,140,630	$2,438,613	$591,383	$1,424,257	$304,162	$205,015	$207,922	$409,423	$9,721,405
	Southeast	$3,733,550	$3,316,996	$119,650	$1,026,238	$10,219	$67,516	$122	$362,130	$8,636,466
	Totals	$26,768,293	$18,390,732	$2,690,675	$8,489,164	$3,229,155	$1,234,877	$4,742,032	$2,659,712	$68,194,705

Source: Regional College Annual Reports (2010)

4.0 EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS **IN CONTEXT**

The demand for efficiency and effectiveness in governmental and non-profit organizations is a reasonable one even if these organizations occasionally suggest that the nature of their work, being socially or otherwise ordained, places them beyond efficiency and effectiveness criteria. We distinguish in this section between efficiency and effectiveness and suggest how these criteria might be applied to regional colleges. There are no simple formulae. Being efficient and effective is largely a matter of judgement under constraints. As we will argue, there are limits to how efficient any regional college can be given that by their very nature they are territorially dispersed. Similarly, effectiveness is hard to achieve when the ultimate objectives of the organization are unclear or in dispute. None of these constraints make the criteria of efficiency and effectiveness irrelevant; they simply make achieving them a difficult, indeed a never-ending, challenge. The colleges have been responding to that challenge and this section examines and evaluates that response and the related topic of governance and accountability.

4.1 Efficiency versus Effectiveness?

Efficiency is easily the most recognized criterion for evaluating the uses to which limited resources are put. Organizations that are efficient produce more desired outputs with less costly inputs. This does not imply that small inputs are better than large ones, only that the

efficiency criterion is based on the assumption that it is better to conserve than waste resources. Herbert Simon (1997: 256) makes the point this way:

> *Underlying all administrative decisions is a limitation—a "scarcity"—of available resources. This is the fundamental reason why time and money are costs. Because they are limited in quantity, their application to one administrative purpose prevents the realization of alternative possibilities. Hence, the administrative choice among possibilities can always be framed as a choice among alternatives involving the same cost, but different positive values.*

The different positive values that Simon refers to, it must be noted, can seldom be measured on the same scale. A fire marshal may have to decide between adding another firefighter to a unit and purchasing new equipment; a school principal decides between buying a new school bus and renting a new portable classroom. Not only that, but the inputs—time, money and administrative attention—are not the same as the outputs—more classroom space or firefighting capacity. These realities make a simple input-output ratio a misleading way of defining efficiency. That is why improving efficiency always involves a judgement in which the administrator is required to choose, sometimes under unfavourable conditions, the alternative that produces the largest result for a given application of resources.

The largest result is not necessarily the best result, even if it satisfies the efficiency criterion. This is because different values are placed on different outputs. The question of what to value introduces the effectiveness criterion, which is not one that most economists, who are famous for their adherence to efficiency norms, are particularly interested in. For example, in his enormously influential essay on the tradeoff between equality and efficiency, Arthur Okun (1975: 4) explained that, "[t]he concept of efficiency implies that more is better insofar as 'more' consists of items that people want to buy." Why people want what they want and whether those choices are socially or personally sound are questions that Okun declined to consider. In the context of a market economy, it did not seem necessary. Consumers are deemed rational inasmuch as they are in the best position to judge what makes them better off.

The inclination among economists to avoid the question of values when discussing efficiency is closely connected with the presumption that efficiency is best achieved using the price mechanism in competitive markets. In the neo-classical model, firms are organizations that produce homogeneous products in markets characterized by perfect information. Firms in these markets will choose alternatives that maximize net financial returns. They are, in other words, efficiency seeking by definition. This efficiency imperative, moreover, can be counted on to maximize social welfare as long as it takes place in markets characterized by perfect competition and no externalities.

Needless to say, neither regional colleges nor public institutions in general operate under these conditions. Indeed, neither do most firms. That is why funding public organizations strictly on the basis of their efficiency would be fraught with problems. Public health agencies seek to "improve population health," recreation units aim to "improve physical fitness," and regional colleges want to "increase educational opportunities." Even if it were possible to agree on reasonable indicators for these objectives, it would be difficult to compare the relative efficiency of organizations in realizing them. As Sir Tony Atkinson (2005: 11) describes in his detailed methodological report on measures of public sector activity in the United Kingdom,

> *"Government output is generally non-market output in the sense that it is supplied free or at prices that are not economically significant. It is the absence of market transactions that underlies many of the problems in measuring output."*

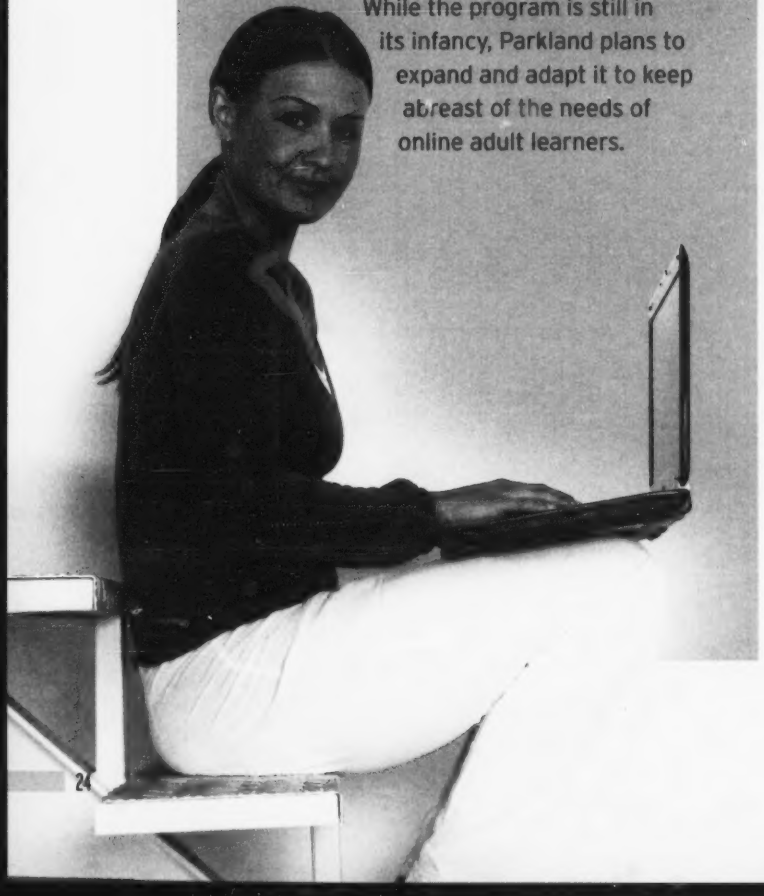
These realities do not mean that the efficiency criterion is rendered somehow irrelevant in the public sector. The Government of Saskatchewan's efforts to promote efficiency are most evident in the various LEAN initiatives that are currently underway, although there are numerous other examples. The assumption driving these efficiency reforms is the desire to reduce government costs and attain higher levels of output in the use of resources. We may not be in the marketplace, but resources must still be conserved and choices must still be geared to output. But for the agency or government department that seeks to do so, the concept of efficiency must be broadened to take into account goals that cannot be expressed in monetary terms. These include broad considerations such as "the public interest" and specific objectives such as workplace satisfaction that do not lend themselves to easy quantification.

To be successful, efficiency promoting initiatives, no matter how well conceived, require agreement on values and objectives. There is no point in being efficient in the production of outputs that are not valued. The concept of effectiveness is intended to capture the idea that it is not just outputs, but valued outputs, that must be efficiently produced. Effectiveness is a criterion that focuses attention on the need for agreed upon objectives. In some cases it draws attention away from outputs and toward outcomes since goals are arrayed on a means-ends continuum. Still, it is easy to see how effectiveness and efficiency are presumed to go together or at least be complementary. The

ONLINE **ABE**

In Saskatchewan, demand for adult basic education continues to exceed the supply. All Colleges offer programs in their regions, but **Parkland College** has taken a further step by mounting an online adult basic education (ABE) class. Beginning with two courses in the 2008-2009 school year, Parkland added eight more Adult 12 classes the next year, enabling learners to complete their full Adult 12 program requirements online.

Originally aimed at adult learners located on reserves and in smaller communities within the region, the online program has expanded across the province, including various school divisions, home-schooled students and even other regional college students. The program's success has been attributed to the user-friendly nature of the online programming and, more importantly, to the dedicated support staff at Parkland College. While the program is still in its infancy, Parkland plans to expand and adapt it to keep abreast of the needs of online adult learners.



effectiveness criterion forces attention on how to conceive of the goal to be achieved, while efficiency describes the extent to which money, time and/or effort are best used to achieve it.

In the Westminster system of parliamentary government the minister is largely responsible for effectiveness while the public service is responsible for efficiency. The minister provides the appropriate leadership regarding what is valued and what must be achieved; the ministry endeavors to meet these expectations in a manner that makes optimal use of public money. This characterization of roles fails to do justice to the interplay of policy and administration, but it does illustrate an intended division of labour. Another way of making the same point is to observe that most decisions of government have a business and a policy component. The business component is largely conveyed in efficiency terms; the policy component represents the conscious decision to pursue a public objective. Reconciling the two is by no means impossible; in fact, justifying most political decisions requires a strong element of both.

Measuring organizational performance in terms of inputs and outputs (efficiency) and in terms of how the actual effects measure up to the original policy objective (effectiveness) is a government priority in every province in Canada. As Mintron (2011: 26) explains

> *"[t]hinking in terms of effectiveness is important because it leads us to consider the likelihood that a given policy intervention will have a significant impact on the problem at hand. A focus on efficiency leads us to consider how we can conserve scarce resources while still attaining our goals."*

Tensions can arise, however, when efforts to achieve efficiencies are perceived as undermining effectiveness, that is, the achievement of valued goals. It may be true that you cannot manage what you cannot measure, but measures can occasionally become the only yardstick of progress, prompting an overinvestment in achieving them that is ultimately counterproductive. Similarly, an overly enthusiastic commitment to a particular objective, regardless of its costs to the organization at large, can create waste by generating oppressive opportunity costs.

Using efficiency and effectiveness criteria is a matter of judgement, both on the part of those who are responsible for allocating resources toward priorities and those responsible for estimating the wisdom of these choices. After all, no intervention, however well intended and well designed, can be counted on to always produce the desired outcome. Estimating effectiveness is a particularly

vulnerable enterprise, always subject to the erroneous presumption that just because an action issues from an admired theoretical position, it must therefore be effective. Effectiveness is a causal and analytic concept concerned with the relationship between anticipated effects and actual outcomes (Bardach 2000; Spicker 2006). The basic assumption is that program x can fix problem y. The relationship between the policy objective and the real effect of the intervention can only be measured where objectives are explicit. However, given the complexity of many public problems, and the difficulty of modeling even well defined outcomes, it is perilous to attribute causal efficacy to a single variable like a policy intervention. The degree of effectiveness, in other words, is sometimes beyond the control of decision-makers (Mandl, et. al. 2008).

4.2 Efficiency and Effectiveness of Regional Colleges

The peril of estimating the efficiency and effectiveness of public entities is nicely illustrated by the case of regional colleges. For example, in creating and sustaining colleges a decision was made to inject an element of territorial distribution into the provision of post-secondary education in Saskatchewan. Whether consciously or not, governments in Saskatchewan chose at the same time to forego the efficiency advantages of centralized provision, preferring the effectiveness advantages of (let us assume) building participation rates. Given that centralization necessarily accompanies the creation of complex universities and that technical training has been assembled under the single administrative umbrella of SIAST, the idea of regionalizing at least some post-secondary education can be readily justified in terms of overall balance. It does mean, however, that administrative units and executive functions are duplicated in several dispersed sites.

> No one can say definitively how much efficiency might be achieved by investing in the "system" as an administrative entity, but it is safe to say that this is an underexplored area.

The traditional means of overcoming some of the constraints on efficiency that territorial distribution represents, is to encourage partnerships among the dispersed units. Executive leadership is required in each of the colleges, but there may be opportunities to achieve economies by entering into procurement agreements, for example, or by sharing certain technical information and know-how. Certainly the colleges, and the province, could benefit from the sharing of programming information and expertise. No one can say definitively how much efficiency might be achieved by investing in the "system" as an administrative entity, but it is safe to say that this is an underexplored area. More often than not, rather than hearing about examples of collaboration on process or content, we were told of missed opportunities and decisions taken with little or no attention to what is happening elsewhere. In the matter of efficiency, and much else, system-level concerns are far from prominent.

In seeking efficiency care should be taken to avoid rough and ready comparisons of input and output or even activity levels. It is not difficult to show, for example, that it is considerably more expensive to educate students in the North than anywhere else in the province. It is also considerably less expensive, on a per student basis, to provide education where the opportunity exists to subsidize public budgets with private resources. Saskatchewan is a single province, but there are distinctive regional economies and demographic profiles that stand in the way of simple comparisons. In fact, there is a growing differentiation of regional economies and labour market needs in Canada as a whole (McMurdy and Rajasekaran, 2008: 8). This is particularly true in Saskatchewan where different regions have different labour market conditions in spite of the relatively uniform population growth (Elliot 2009). In the two major urban centres, the challenge presented by increases in immigration (the need for ESL instruction, for example), can be accommodated within an already extensive human resource infrastructure. Elsewhere that infrastructure has to be created. It is these kinds of considerations that need to be incorporated into efficiency estimates.

This plea for caution should not be interpreted as a counsel of surrender in the face of intractable measurement problems. It is quite conceivable that budgets for the regional colleges could be built around activity levels, with provision made to ensure that funding tracks success in delivering agreed upon results, the successful completion of courses, for example. At the moment, as we have indicated elsewhere, the budgets of the colleges are the product of a host of different historical decisions and are only loosely connected to output measures. A new budgeting process, based on historical activity levels, known cost differentials, mandated programming and entrepreneurship, is long overdue.

As important as efficiency concerns are, what stands in the way of a more rational budgeting process is agreement on what constitutes effectiveness. Increasing the number of students who successfully complete regional college courses is of little value if the courses themselves are inappropriate. Here we face the problem, introduced at the outset, of agreeing on what regional colleges are for. The point was made in the introduction, and elsewhere, that the original desire to provide distributed learning opportunities via independent colleges has been joined (and perhaps eclipsed) by a pressing requirement to meet labour market shortfalls. Thankfully it is not necessary to choose one objective over the other. Public sector organizations are familiar with, even defined by, the need to balance competing goals (Wilson 1989). Or, in the terminology used here, they must balance competing ideas about what constitutes effectiveness.

The first step in achieving that balance is to establish agreement on valid expectations. During our consultations we received one consistent message: government needs to clarify goals and expectations for colleges. The review panel was repeatedly told that neither efficiency nor effectiveness could be properly measured without a clear set of goals and priorities. Board members, in particular, voiced frustration concerning the lack of political direction, suggesting that an overarching provincial strategy would help colleges with their strategic planning process and with programming decisions. One board member put the situation this way: "We are micro-managed by the province, yet they don't respond to their own strategic plans concerning growth and meeting industry needs." Another board member (from an different college) made a more general plea: "We need more direction from the province as a whole. What do they want us to be doing?"

As important as efficiency concerns are, what stands in the way of a more rational budgeting process is agreement on what constitutes effectiveness.

As frequently as we heard the complaint that no direction is forthcoming from government, we also heard that the government expects the colleges to address labour market needs. This apparent paradox may be an issue of precision: exactly what labour market needs are the most pressing? Or it might be a matter of "yes, but." Administrators, board members and representatives from communities throughout the province acknowledge the labour market imperative, but they also give voice to a social development dimension of regional college work. Colleges, they insist, represent hope for some, a second chance for others, and a means of integrating into the local community for still others. A cursory examination of the mission and vision statements of regional colleges (Table 4.1) provides an indication of the diverse way in which these various roles are interpreted. Note, in particular, the consistent reference to lifelong learning and community and social development. The economy is not ignored, but it is not the only reference point.

Achieving an agreed upon mandate for the regional colleges should be a priority. It is not a matter of seizing on a single goal and requiring everything else to be subordinated to it. What is required is clarity regarding the values that all colleges should be seeking to advance. On the basis of interviews and conversations, there are three overlapping frames of reference that emerge again and again: the provincial economy, the local community and the individual student. Each one deserves attention and, in most cases, their interests can be advanced together. But some means must be found to identify goals in each area, create strategies to achieve them and establish performance measures that can be monitored on a province-wide basis.

4.3 The Balanced Scorecard

Organizations that are struggling to identify goals and establish agreed upon means of achieving them often reach for management tools that have been pioneered in the private sector, where efficiency and effectiveness are not merely nice to have but are essential for survival. The "balanced scorecard" is one of the most popular of these techniques and, while it originated in the private sector, it has features that make it particularly attractive for government agencies and non-profit organizations.

The "scorecard" idea implies measures, and the task of measuring progress represents the core "raison d'être" of the approach. In the words of the concept's main protagonists, Kaplan and Norton (1992: 71), "What you measure is what you get. Senior executives understand that their organization's measurement system strongly affects the behavior of managers and employees." The "balance" idea comes from the belief that too much attention has been paid to financial measures and that the long-term prospects of firms (and other organizations) cannot afford to be in thrall to the short-term orientation that frequently

TABLE 4.1: Regional Colleges Mission Statements

	Mission/ Purpose of Organization	Vision/ Future Goals
Carlton Trail Regional College	To identify and provide quality education, training and career services to enhance personal and community development	Carlton Trail Regional College will create greater opportunities through the power of learning
Cumberland College	Cumberland College is committed to providing excellent lifelong learning opportunities today, that prepare individuals and communities for tomorrow.	Cumberland College will be the preferred choice for adult education and training in North Eastern Saskatchewan
Great Plains College	Great Plains College's mission is to provide education and skills training that meets the needs of the communities and employers it serves	Great Plains College plays a leadership role in the economic and social development of western Saskatchewan. As part of an integrated post-secondary education system, it is a provincial leader in energy sector training. Responsive to learners, employers, and communities, Great Plains College brings unbridled energy to labour market development and student achievement.
North West Regional College	The mission of North West Regional College is to provide adult learning opportunities and to promote lifelong learning as a means of enhancing the cultural, economic, and social life of the individuals and communities it serves.	Our vision is to be a client centered educational institution of excellence, balancing the education and training needs of learners, employers and community. In all programs the College will train, educate, and prepare learners who reflect our diverse regional demographics to contribute to a representative workforce.
Northlands College	The mission of Northlands College is to provide quality education and training programs and services that will meet the development and employment needs of Northerners, enhance social and economic development, and prepare Northerners to participate in the labour market.	Preparing Northerners to participate in the social, economic and labour market development of Saskatchewan.
Parkland Regional College	To create an innovative continuum of learning stimulating individual, community, and economic growth.	The College of choice celebrating quality learning and service.
Southeast Regional College	To provide access to learning experiences and information that enable people and communities to meet the realities of today and create opportunities for tomorrow.	Leading the way, reaching people and communities through the power of learning.

Source: Regional College Annual Reports (2010)

dominates financial calculations. As a result the balanced scorecard introduces other vantage points from which it is possible to capture a fuller range of activities that bear on the organization's future. In the original formula, which has been critiqued and amended, they were presented as follows (Kaplan and Norton 1996):

Financial perspective: Growth, profitability and risk from the perspective of the shareholder.

Customer perspective: The creation of value and product identity from the perspective of the customer.

Internal process perspective: Internal business processes that contribute to employee, customer and shareholder satisfaction.

Learning and growth perspective: Organizational change and innovation.

Kaplan and Norton (1993) make it clear that their methodology is more than a bundle of measures. It is intended to be a management system motivated to translate strategy into action and thereby promote breakthrough improvements in new products, customer relations and market development.

In October 2010 the regional colleges contracted Norman Sheehan from the Edwards School of Business at the University of Saskatchewan to assist them in developing a balanced scorecard system for the Saskatchewan regional college system. This system has its limitations, of course, but the ideas behind it are broadly congenial to governmental and non-profit organizations. For one thing, the balanced scorecard is not an approach dominated by financial measures. In fact, the accounting profession has been somewhat apprehensive about measures of performance that are removed and even remote from the bottom line. But for government and non-profit organizations the bottom line lies elsewhere and capturing it normally requires non-financial measures. The financial health of the organization is a means to its ultimate goals and those goals can only be expressed in the terms of the organization's social ambitions.

The social ambitions of the regional colleges are expressed, in nascent form, in their mission and vision statements. These are good starting points for successful change, but as the practitioners and promoters of the balanced scorecard insist, they must be connected to actions and measures that focus on outputs (not simply on processes) if they are to be of genuine use in tracking progress. In addition, care needs to be taken to ensure that those who support the organization, in this case the provincial government but in other cases donors and other non-profit organizations, are satisfied with the balance sought and the measures used. Governments are undoubtedly interested in how satisfied students are with their regional college experience, but they are also legitimately interested in how many of these students go on to take up crucial jobs in a rapidly expanding economy. They support training programs not just to help unemployed workers, or to increase the overall level of academic achievement in the province, but to reduce aggregate unemployment and achieve social equity goals for groups traditionally underrepresented in the labour force.

Here are the goals identified by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration and expressed in the Ministry Plan 2010-2011:

- Ensure a skilled workforce to meet existing and future labour market demand;
- Ensure that Saskatchewan's post-secondary system is characterized by: excellence, innovation, inclusion and accountability, and is responsive to the needs of learners and Saskatchewan's labour market;
- Increase post-secondary education levels and labour market participation of First Nations and Métis peoples to meet existing and future labour market demand;
- Support increased attraction and retention of newcomers to Saskatchewan;
- Foster productive, safe and competitive workplaces; and,
- Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the ministry's programs, services and systems to ensure the best use of public funds.

It seems unlikely that the balanced scorecard approach, or any other management tool designed to measure progress toward goals, will succeed unless these goals are operationalized and reconciled with the goals that are being developed as part of the colleges' own efforts at strategic planning.

Among the social goals espoused by regional colleges themselves, none is more obvious than the goal of improving achievement levels for Aboriginal students. Both the provincial and federal governments are openly supportive. What is required is a strategic approach that is grounded in measurement strategies like the balanced scorecard. At the moment outcome measures in this area

TABLE 4.2: Aboriginal Participation Rates

		2005-2006			2009-2010		
		Total Enrolment	Aboriginal Enrolment	% Aboriginal	Total Enrolment	Aboriginal Enrolment	% Aboriginal
COLLEGE	Carlton Trail	2381	176	7.4%	1819	224	12.3%
	Cumberland	1153	283	24.5%	1676	594	35.4%
	Great Plains	4918	168	3.4%	6477	438	6.8%
	Northlands	1806	1590	88%	1711	1578	92.2%
	North West	2193	903	41.2%	3131	1358	43.4%
	Parkland	2504	674	26.9%	3408	842	24.7%
	Southeast	4934	265	5.4%	4121	180	4.4%
	TOTALS	19889	4059	20.4%	22343	5214	23.3%

Source: Regional College Annual Reports (2006 - 2010)

TABLE 4.3: ESL Enrolments 2005-2010

		2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
COLLEGE	Carlton Trail	n/a	n/a	3	45	73
	Cumberland	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Great Plains	34	48	83	110	131
	Northlands	0	0	0	0	0
	North West	0	0	64	167	196
	Parkland	16	30	56	112	147
	Southeast	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	109

Source: Regional College Annual Reports (2006 – 2010)

ENERGY **TRAINING**

An increase in oil and gas activity in southeastern Saskatchewan has created a high level of demand in energy related trades. The Saskatchewan Energy Training Institute in Estevan, a division of **Southeast Regional College**, was founded twenty years ago to serve the safety and skills training needs of the industrial and energy sectors in southeast Saskatchewan. With a projected shortage of skilled workers in the region, Southeast Regional College has developed a specialized programming array specific to the energy sector. Recently, programming has expanded dramatically and one of the many new programs being offered is an eighteen-week Oil and Gas Field Operations program, which was created specifically to address the projected shortage oil and rig workers. In addition, the college is nearing completion of its $19 million training facility in Estevan.

are in their infancy. As Table 4.2 shows, just over 23 percent of the students registered in regional colleges in 2009-10 are self-declared as Aboriginal, a significantly greater proportion than at either of the province's two universities. Little is known, however, about their success in college programs or in the labour market.

Similarly, the regional colleges have been remarkably responsive to the educational needs of recent immigrants, particularly their need to acquire English language skills for the workplace. As Table 4.3 indicates, the colleges are playing an increasingly central role in providing programs intended to permit newcomers to the province to live and work in small towns and rural areas. How successful are these programs? Do students acquire the skills necessary to participate in, or simply to navigate, the economy? Outcome measures are the backbone of the balanced scorecard and of all attempts to evaluate efficiency and effectiveness. Their development requires agreement on what success looks like and on the creation of a database that is adequate to the task of tracking progress.

These comments on the balanced scorecard and tools like it prompt the observation that outside the for-profit, commercial arena, it may be more important to evaluate the entire "industry" rather than any given organization in it (Moore 2003). Regional colleges are competitive in many ways, but they may be reluctant to compete on these terms given the numerous obstacles to both measuring and achieving success. A focus on the entire "system" of colleges may help to mitigate this reluctance and would have the added benefit of obliging colleges to settle on a single set of goals and measures and resist the natural temptation to develop those that are most congenial to the status quo.

4.4 Centralization versus Decentralization

Regional colleges are geographically dispersed units that are not functionally specialized but do offer a degree of custom-designed or personalized services intended to meet the needs of diverse customers. It is legitimate to question the value of these tailored services (the particular mix of programs, for example) compared to their costs and to ask, implicitly, whether there should be an increased centralization in at least some areas, and perhaps a decentralization in others.

We will not attempt a comprehensive answer to this question. Indeed, such a project would require an extensive (even heroic) effort to measure value along the lines discussed above. It is worth observing, however, that among the centralized features of regional colleges is the

understanding that many of their services will take the form of brokered programs developed by other post-secondary providers, principally SIAST and the province's universities. The colleges have agitated for many years to acquire the right to develop and certify their own programs, in effect to decentralize some curriculum control.

Generalizations in this area are dangerous, but it is not uncommon to recommend that cost conscious client-centred organizations attempt to delegate decisions downward to the lowest level "where they can be adequately made" (Kochon and Deutsch 1977: 269). This principle is frequently defended on the grounds that those most familiar with the circumstances and conditions are best suited to make judgements about them. Besides, increased participation in decision-making has its own benefits. Against this view, in the case of regional colleges, is the argument that higher education cannot tolerate local standards and that students deserve to know that their programs have met, and continue to meet, well established expectations. Moreover, there are significant efficiency advantages entailed by centralizing executive functions while retaining a distributed educational network.

This discussion will be continued, but not settled, in the following section. The point to be made here concerns the effectiveness of regional colleges rather than their efficiency. Since Hayek (1945) the case has been made that central planning units are incapable of duplicating the knowledge that exists in the hands of local entrepreneurs. Changes in demand, opportunities and costs are understood better by decentralized units and can be capitalized on faster without waiting for a central authority to respond. Hayek attributed this responsiveness to the price system, but a more general argument can be made in favour of allowing local entrepreneurs to explore niche markets and change the product mix. In the case of regional colleges that line of argument would suggest that they be encouraged to develop future-oriented programming to anticipate changes in demand.

Woven into the body of this report are shaded boxes illustrating some of the innovations that regional colleges have championed in recent years. They are a sample of the programming initiatives that have been introduced without direction from an organizational centre. In the absence of a province-wide strategy for a regional college system, the colleges themselves have launched projects that were never contemplated by the original legislation but that are increasingly necessary in a more competitive post-secondary world. Regional colleges are relatively heterogeneous and possess immobile resources. Their comparative advantage will come in producing specialized offerings that capitalize on local knowledge and have value for local customers and stakeholders. In this regard the regional colleges have become very adept at identifying links between regional economic opportunities and training needs. During the community consultations local partners made the following observations:

- The best thing about the college is its ability to step up to our needs when we need [them] to, especially with customized training. (Great Plains)
- The college is an incredibly responsive institution when it comes to northern needs, the northern economy and northern people. (Northlands)
- From a business perspective the college is very helpful as [they] have educational capacity and they are flexible in catering to the business community's needs, which is a big benefit when attracting business and promoting growth. (Parkland)

Consideration should be given to encouraging and rewarding initiatives that meet emerging demands and pioneer programming that can be marketed to others. The province has constructed a higher education system with strong elements of monopoly and limited elements of competition. If, as seems likely, effectiveness-seeking organizations will be needed as much as efficiency-seeking organizations, the colleges should be considered as vehicles for experimentation and innovation.

The price of more independence is greater collaboration and coordination. Colleges are currently underperforming in terms of pooling resources to meet common needs. That needs to improve. Similarly, some of the independence colleges currently enjoy will have to be sacrificed if they expect a more strategic approach from the provincial government. Governments may not be adept at understanding local conditions, but they have significant coordination capabilities. The price of more independence in programming will be greater coordination in strategy and evaluation. A robust accountability system will help.

4.5 Governance and Accountability

The concept of accountability assumes a person or body has acquired both authority and obligations relative to others. Being accountable entails a willingness to explain and justify the use of authority in meeting those obligations. In Canada democratic accountability has been understood in political terms to issue from the doctrine of ministerial responsibility. Ministers are responsible to the elected

assembly to answer for the authority they have been given and to take ameliorative actions when these actions are warranted. Indeed, they are obliged to do so.

Similarly, those who serve on the boards of regional colleges have also acquired authority and obligations, in this case the authority to govern the college and the obligation to discharge the attendant responsibilities in a manner that serves the college's interests. Saskatchewan regional colleges have autonomous boards of governors appointed through orders-in-council. Boards are responsible for the fiscal management and policy direction of the college as well as for ensuring that operations are carried out in accordance with provincial legislation. Accountability between the minister and each of these boards is outlined in legislation and board chairs are expected to establish a working relationship and a line of communication that ensures the responsible minister is informed of general directions and specific developments.

This kind of accountability is sometimes called "upward accountability" and is typically associated with hierarchies that have well established reporting systems and chains of command. The ministry employs a series of tools intended to ensure that this kind of accountability is achieved:

1. Regional Needs Assessment: Colleges are expected to undertake a regional needs assessment to assist in forecasting and strategic planning. Each college provides a copy of the assessment to the ministry.

2. Operations Forecast: Colleges are expected to provide an operations forecast that uses the needs assessments to justify requests for incremental funding.

3. Business Plan: Section 15 of the *Regional Colleges Act* requires the colleges to submit for approval a yearly budget in the form of a business plan.

4. Program Plan: Program plans are required to receive targeted program funding.

5. Annual Report: Sections 12.1 and 16 of the *Regional Colleges Act* require the colleges to submit financial statements and annual reports indicating how funds were spent.

6. Report on Equity Participation: Colleges are expected to report on equity participation to ensure the Skills Training Allocation targets are met.

On its own each one of the above reporting mechanisms is an appropriate tool for ensuring public accountability. Taken together they are widely considered an unreasonable burden. In 2010-11 the ministry took steps to reduce the reporting structure by introducing the Skills Training Allocation, which combined three separate program funding envelopes into one allocation. This is a positive step. Next steps will involve the kind of strategic planning described earlier that elevates everyone's gaze and ensures that financial measures are accompanied by non-financial measures in a more comprehensive and balanced approach to upward accountability.

Governance, in short, involves organizing to meet assumed obligations. Nothing is more important.

A second type of accountability, "outward accountability," involves meeting the expectations of a potentially broad array of stakeholders and, in some cases, the public at large. Regional colleges are public entities and, as we have discussed in this section, they pursue broad social agendas. Steering the college involves both types of accountability, and, while upward accountability is always the dominant form, the successful discharge of obligations sometimes requires achieving a delicate balance between the two.

Governance refers to the body of practices that boards adopt to ensure accountability. The board's job is to oversee the work of management, ensure that the requisite plans are in place, and vouchsafe the financial soundness of the entire operation. The CEO is accountable to the board and it is accountable to the minister.

While governance may seem rather remote from efficiency and effectiveness, neither regional colleges nor other organizations can reach their efficiency and effectiveness goals in the absence of strong governance arrangements. The actions required to establish overall direction for the college, coordinate with central authorities and discharge legal requirements are all the ultimate responsibility of the board. So is responsibility for performance management. Governance, in short, involves organizing to meet assumed obligations. Nothing is more important.

Regional college board members presently receive training through the Governance Leadership Series. Board members are appreciative of the opportunity to learn with others and describe the series in broadly positive terms. It is not clear, however, that board members emerge with anything more than a generic sense of their fiduciary responsibilities or a general idea the kinds of policies boards must have to meet governance standards. Similarly, there is no evidence that regional colleges, as a whole, have developed a set of governance tools to which they all subscribe. Once again, the "system" is underdeveloped.

We emphasized at the beginning of this section that efficiency and effectiveness depended on judgements, not formulae. The colleges would be well served by ensuring that the judgements of board members are strengthened by an intimate familiarity with the practices and procedures that improve accountability.

5.0 TENSIONS

> We are a bunch of empire builders playing in a zero-sum game.
>
> - Regional College CEO

In recent years changes in the learning environment, as outlined in earlier sections, new assignments from government, and a growing sense of entrepreneurialism have generated some tensions for regional colleges. For the sake of clarity, we have grouped these tensions into the following categories based on key relationships: college-to-college relations, colleges and other post-secondary providers, and colleges and the ministry. Before taking up each relationship, it should be said that there is considerable good faith among the colleges and their many partners (notwithstanding the opening quote). Generally speaking, those who work in and with regional colleges seek to understand one another and to develop positive working relationships based on mutual support. Face-to-face discussions are common, and participants often seek out and become acquainted with counterparts in other organizations. This is particularly true of post-secondary providers where collaboration is often necessary to achieve the critical mass needed to operate courses.

Nonetheless, each major player in the post-secondary system—government, universities, SIAST and the colleges themselves—has interests that are not entirely congruent with one another. Moreover, in pursuit of these interests all parties have developed practices that are understandable and defensible on their own, but that aggravate working relationships. In this section we outline the tensions that have developed over the years without casting blame on any of the parties. In fact, some tensions are useful in that they expose problems in the system's architecture that should be remedied. In that way this section sets the stage for our conclusions and recommendations.

5.1 College-to-College Relations

As we have emphasized from the beginning, regional colleges are a system in name only. Put another way, the "system" is little more than the sum of its parts. Because each college is assigned a territory and expected to develop relationships with local and provincial partners, few formal mechanisms require, or even encourage, cooperation beyond information sharing. Although relations are usually cordial, individual colleges do not plan offerings in a coordinated manner to meet agreed upon needs and provincially mandated targets. They are inclined to see one another as potential threats rather than potential partners.

The idea that colleges might pose threats to one another arises almost entirely from the territorial orientation that is the most conspicuous part of their mandate. Many college administrators, board representatives and community members endorse the concept that the region consists of "our" students and the college exists to serve them. Students who leave to take courses elsewhere represent losses to the region; students who come to the college from other regions sometimes appear as interlopers who might be taking spaces away from local qualified applicants. This attitude is reinforced by the need to assure those who live within the region that local community needs are being met. Rather than looking outward to address system wide issues, the colleges feel obliged to look inward to the expectations of local supporters, who are typically concerned with retaining or expanding offerings in the small towns and cities of rural Saskatchewan. These are legitimate demands given the colleges' territorial mandate, but they detract from province-wide considerations when it comes to planning.

There are encouraging signs that the colleges intend to reset the balance between inward and outward orientations. Information sharing among academic managers has been a traditional strong point in providing coordination. Their annual meetings afford opportunities to share program planning and compare demand for programs. Even facilities, in the form of mobile teaching labs for welding, plumbing and electrical, constitute opportunities to coordinate offerings and share resources. Most important, the Association of Regional Colleges has become increasingly active as a voice for the college system. The renewed commitment to advocacy on behalf of the colleges as a whole is a sign that the colleges recognize that they have at least some shared interests, particularly in relation to government.

Also shared is a strong commitment to student success. The colleges have retained counseling services that were once funded separately and in many cases have expanded ABE offerings to include "life skills" training. The regional college website features "success stories" and invites the conclusion that enabling students is a major priority of all colleges.

There are encouraging signs that the colleges intend to reset the balance between inward and outward orientations.

How deep does this conviction run? From the student perspective it is hard to see much evidence of coordination. Nowhere will students find a single source to let them know where courses are being offered in the province, their start dates and the details of registration. The website gives no indication of how one enters the system because there is no system in terms of admission. All programming is managed at the individual college level and the overall website makes a point of asking prospective students where they live in the province. The unstated but obvious presumption is that regional college programming is aimed at those who reside within each region and students should think of themselves as regional consumers of higher education. Classes are assembled at the regional level and students from "outside" are obliged to use their own sources and resources to discover opportunities that may require them to temporarily relocate. If information sharing is the necessary prelude to coordination and planning, there is little evidence of it from the student perspective.

An abiding impediment to planning and coordination is the quality and availability of the information held by each of the colleges. Data on enrolments is particularly suspect, given that there are no system-wide regulations or guidelines on how to measure student access . The universal headcount statistic is generally recognized as a poor

substitute for a database in which a variety of activities, including courses offered and hours of instruction, are monitored. The ministry maintains a database called One Client Service Model (OCSM) that colleges use, but it is far from perfect and the subject of much discussion between colleges and the ministry. Information is presented in ways that may meet the needs of the colleges, not necessarily those of other users. The performance of each of the colleges against the efficiency criterion discussed earlier is not easy to assess. As the balanced scorecard initiative suggests, the colleges are moving to address the issue, but neither they nor the government will make the intended progress without a reliable and cooperatively managed database.

Colleges and Other Post-Secondary Providers. While colleges enjoy an unrivaled relationship with local industry, broadly defined, and can offer tailored programming to meet "just-in-time" educational needs, a large part of college programming is "brokered" from SIAST and the universities. The concept of brokering involves the local offering of someone else's program. Fees are paid and students obtain a credential that is recognized by the originating institution. In this model the colleges are literally the sites on which programs are offered and proximity is the principal advantage from the student point of view. The value added by the college is small given that the senior institutions must approve instructors and that the curriculum cannot be significantly adjusted.

Relations with the universities can be described as generally positive. The colleges are widely perceived as cooperative in degree programming, and the universities, which are typically offering Arts and Science courses, are generally satisfied with the arrangements offered by the colleges. The financial agreement struck years ago, in which the colleges obtain tuition revenue only after revenue for the first 15 students is remitted to the universities, means that these courses are seldom financially advantageous to the colleges (or to the universities for that matter). On the other hand, apart from the coordination and facilities' costs, the operating budgets of the colleges are not taxed too heavily in this arrangement. Students clearly benefit, some of them attending classes that are much smaller than they could expect in either Regina or Saskatoon. From that vantage point, these courses are an attractive and relatively low cost investment in the college's image and reputation.

Whether the arrangement serves provincial needs is harder to judge. Televised courses are an efficient means of reaching a highly dispersed audience of students, and colleges are required partners in that endeavor. The bulk of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) funding has gone to the universities as the principal content providers, leaving the colleges with relatively little independent development capability. On-line courses do not require college involvement and afford the universities an opportunity to reach a dispersed audience without the assistance of colleges at all. So far neither provincial university has developed on-line courses to the point that they are actively considering abandoning their relationship with colleges, in part because students prefer face-to-face instruction or television to on-line courses.

> The colleges have the capacity to generate knowledge of local conditions and needs that cannot be duplicated by a central planning operation, no matter how well-intentioned.

It should be noted, however, that neither university has developed an Arts and Science program that could be accessed in its entirety at a college site (or in combination with on-line learning). In addition, college leaders are of the view that the universities have elected to address enrolment challenges without their advice or involvement. Whether or not these are strategic decisions on the part of the universities, it does mean that the colleges are unable to offer local students an entire degree program. With the conspicuous, and important exception of masters' programs in social work and educational administration, what is offered is the same smattering of courses year after year, most at the first and second year levels. More than one college would welcome the offering of a cohort based BSc in nursing, but the universities would have to ensure that adequate practicum opportunities existed and that the absence of inter-professional education does not make a distributed program fundamentally different from ones offered in either Regina or Saskatoon.

In short, relations between the colleges and the universities have reached an equilibrium in which both parties are basically satisfied. Whether the province should be equally pleased is another matter. The demand for university education might be greater if program offerings were richer or if the prospect existed for actually completing a degree without substantial dislocation. At the moment university courses are a small, almost trivial, part of college business and neither party seems to see the advantage of expanding or extending degree opportunities.

Relations between the colleges and SIAST are more turbulent than relations between the colleges and universities. The colleges are often seen as natural extensions of SIAST. This is partly because the colleges have received the unmistakable message that their programs should focus on labour market attachment, and partly because the local community expects programming for jobs. From another perspective, many college leaders see their organizations as potential competitors, offering many of the same courses as SIAST and taking responsibility for instructors, unlike the case with the universities.

For its part, SIAST is inclined to treat the colleges as junior partners and delivery mechanisms that require quite a bit of oversight. For every case of excellent working relationships there are examples of disagreements around the viability of programs proposed by the colleges and the ability and qualifications of instructors. These tensions could be considered healthy ones in which the colleges' natural desire for greater autonomy is met by SIAST's natural concern for quality control. They are complicated, however, by the agreement on SIAST's part not to offer programs in the regions unless the colleges have been given the opportunity to do so first, and by the colleges' contention that the financial arrangements with SIAST put them at a distinct disadvantage from a competitive point of view. In a head-to-head competition, the current funding model ensures that SIAST always has the advantage because the colleges must pay for the cost of the program plus a fee that SIAST collects as the program's sponsor.

Competition of this kind seldom takes place, but colleges find the fee issue irksome on the grounds that they are paying for programs that have already been paid for by the province. The upshot is that portions of college budgets are turned over to SIAST with little perceived value in return. SIAST, on the other hand, makes the reasonable point that maintaining the quality of its programs requires constant attention and monitoring. Everyone, including the colleges, benefits. From the province's point of view it may make little difference since SIAST costs must presumably be met somehow. The same applies to students. Colleges, however, are inclined to treat the fee as a form of tribute rather than a legitimate cost.

One means of breaking out of this tension would be to sweep the colleges under the auspices of SIAST. This would result in considerable awkwardness in terms of program mix since SIAST does not offer university courses and does not place a premium on the development of industry-specific programming. However, from a planning perspective the gains could be considerable. Instead of waiting for the colleges to propose programs and then agreeing based on local demand and program integrity, SIAST could plan, on behalf of the province, the entire corpus of trades and skills programming. Local presence would be preserved in the form of newly purposed regional colleges, a strong element of quality control would be introduced on a province-wide basis, and the sometimes self-defeating adherence to the territorial imperative would be assuaged, if not ended.

It is unlikely that centralization at the SIAST level would be welcomed in the communities served by regional colleges. For a variety of reasons, SIAST is perceived as remote and somewhat unresponsive, although we heard no objections regarding the quality of SIAST programming. Apart from the natural concerns of local residents, there are good reasons for believing that local knowledge cannot be duplicated at the centre and, even if SIAST were committed to retaining a strong regional college system, the rationale for program offerings would shift perceptibly to the provincial level. This would help meet efficiency concerns, but if attentiveness to local needs is part of the effectiveness equation, the province could lose a significant resource. Put another way, the colleges have the capacity to generate knowledge of local conditions and needs that cannot be duplicated by a central planning operation, no matter how well-intentioned. SIAST has organized itself as a centralized monopoly, allowing it to concentrate training programming in particular sites and to thereby achieve economies of scale. At the moment the province has the best of both models, but the relationship between these two entities has not been rethought in light of changing demands and changing capacities. There is an urgent need to recast this relationship, allowing SIAST to continue to build its capacity in traditional (and ongoing) areas of provincial need, while permitting, indeed requiring, colleges to expand their programming in niche areas that can only be served properly by drawing on local knowledge.

5.2 Colleges and the Ministry

The *Regional Colleges Act* goes into some detail regarding the ministry's control over the affairs of the colleges. Control largely takes the form of approvals for programming and capital investments and reporting requirements for budgets. Programming approval, from the colleges' perspective, is a hit and miss affair with some new programs turned down for reasons that are not clear. There appears to be a lack of clear criteria for new programming, and perhaps

because there is no formal approval mechanism outside of the ministry itself that would attest to program quality, the natural inclination is to decline approvals. In the case of capital, the oversight is stringent with no clear advantages accruing to either the ministry or the colleges. It is not easy to see, for example, how the ministry is better equipped than the colleges to lease property for administrative and instructional purposes. The *Act*, of course, requires approvals and the ministry cannot be faulted for exercising due diligence. The question becomes whether the oversight gains are sufficient to offset the friction that often accompanies these exchanges.

In the matter of financial oversight, most colleges complain that current reporting structures are overly burdensome and that little is done with the information collected. It is not uncommon to hear administrative staff describe the reporting system as "totally inefficient." Or, as one CEO put it: "We spend more time reporting than anything else. At what point does it make sense to do rather than validate and justify?" The ministry acknowledges that the reporting requirements are onerous, but officials point to federal requirements as a source of at least some of the paper burden. Tracking financial commitments in detail is clearly a preoccupation of the ministry, perhaps for good reason. The colleges insist, however, that not only financial, but also planning documents are received without comment. The annual operations forecast, which is an input into the ministry budget preparation, is cited as a case in point. From the perspective of the colleges, meetings with ministry officials to discuss these submissions are infrequent and somewhat haphazard.

These instances of incomplete communication constitute minor issues when set against the much larger complaint that the ministry has not supplied an overall vision for the regional college system that would enable the colleges to make plans and set priorities. The clear hierarchy set out in the legislation has been interpreted almost entirely in control terms. That does not mean that the minister is unresponsive; there was nothing but praise for the minister's willingness to visit and discuss the issues facing individual colleges. What is missing, from the colleges' perspective, is a blueprint for the future of the system. The responsibility for providing this direction, and the resources to implement it, is clearly understood to lay with the ministry.

The absence of an overall strategy is evident in the evolution of the colleges themselves. The consolidation of regional colleges, most recently the amalgamation of two colleges to produce Great Plains, has come at the initiative of college leaders. These developments are remarkable given the preoccupation with territorial exclusivity that marks much of the college discourse. They speak to a growing sense among the colleges themselves that the overall "system" is underperforming because of obstacles to efficient exchange and rationalization. There is a natural fear in some quarters that consolidation will rob smaller communities of a college presence, a threat that sometimes invites ministerial reminders that closures and other forms of rationalization need ministry approval.

> The absence of strong high-level signals about emerging needs does invite a business-as-usual approach.

Programs are another area in which the absence of an overall plan creates tensions between the ministry and the colleges. The ministry has expectations regarding needs assessments that the colleges may not be capable of meeting. Current methods of assessing how many electricians, plumbers, welders or long-haul truck drivers are needed in the province are somewhat uneven. The colleges use strategies that range from discussions with local industry to surveillance of the want ads in local newspapers. The Apprenticeship Commission relies almost exclusively on industry. Between these participants and SIAST, a rather blurred picture emerges, but, to the satisfaction of most providers, a system of offerings is put in place. The problem is that this system is tuned to immediate needs and is more or less unclear about the future.

In jurisdictions like Alberta, the Ministry of Labour is responsible for labour force projections and the development of an overall strategy. Demand at the local level is an input into this strategy, but it is only one input among many. Without high-level guidance, the colleges in Saskatchewan are left to guess whether their decisions coincide with province-wide needs. As a result, local demand and the ability to round up the required students, drives the offerings. This kind of incremental approach might be acceptable if the colleges could be relied upon

not to substitute a supply-oriented approach in which they offer programs that they have offered in the past because instructors and facilities exist to do so. We encountered no direct evidence that colleges indulge in this form of decision-making, but the absence of strong high-level signals about emerging needs does invite a business-as-usual approach.

It is worth pausing on this topic to consider a couple of programs where the absence of overall direction is hampering informed programming choices. The Licensed Practical Nursing program (LPN) is managed by SIAST. Officials there have a well-developed plan for the creation of spaces in various parts of the province. These plans require college cooperation and in some regions this cooperation is easily garnered. Other colleges, however, seem unaware of the existence of any overall strategy or their part in it. One CEO stated bluntly, "I have no idea how the colleges fit into the nursing scene. How many LPNs do we need and where should we educate them? That's a legitimate question that the ministry should answer." The impression is that decisions are made with no involvement from the colleges, but the latter are required to "do the backfill." In at least one college a decision has been made to forego a new LPN class because of its cost and the lack of collaboration with the regional health authority. At the university level, several colleges have expressed an interest in participating in BSc Nursing, and have made investments to facilitate their involvement. So far, only Northlands has received the approval of government and the College of Nursing at the University of Saskatchewan. Plans exist for distributed nursing education, but their construction and even their current status have not been shared with the colleges who, for obvious reasons, do not consider themselves full partners in the endeavor.

The case of ABE involves the ministry more directly. All of the colleges, but particularly those with large Aboriginal populations, lament the low level of financial support for ABE. There is a strong consensus, based on assessments of Saskatchewan's overall level of educational attainment, that a greater commitment to ABE is required. Some of the problem with obtaining a "commitment" may arise from the fact that the federal government has been contributing to this enterprise (approximately 25 percent of funding) and that these resources are subject to negotiation. Funding for services offered on reserves is a particular problem because the colleges feel unable to make long-term commitments in the absence of long-term funding.

It seems likely that the colleges could take the lead in developing a provincial-wide strategy for ABE in partnership with the ministry. It would involve a plan for spaces, a rethinking of the provincial training allowance, and a clear set of performance indicators. Underinvestment will continue without a program that can develop a high level of trust among colleges, SIAST, the ministry and students. No one doubts the importance of ABE for the long-term growth of the province, but the responsibility for it is too widely distributed to garner anything more than hope that more positive results are likely to be forthcoming.

The tensions outlined here have their origins in the original vision for the regional colleges. This vision, as we have stated before, is based on an implicit spoke and hub arrangement in which each college relates separately to the centre and no coordination, indeed no system, is required beyond what the ministry itself provides. When the colleges were new and developing their programming, this vision may have been appropriate, but it no longer serves the province well. Colleges have developed to the point that they can be treated as full partners in province-wide decision making. And a province-wide approach is going to be required to meet the needs of industry and students. The needs of the community, the original principal touch point for the colleges, can and should be met within a broader strategy that contributes to the personal growth of students and the economic growth of the province, as much as the viability of local communities.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS: **CLARITY GOING FORWARD**

There is a strong consensus in some quarters, and a grudging recognition in others, that regional colleges have outgrown their original mandates. Expectations of higher learning have changed and the demand for some form of post-secondary education has increased dramatically since the colleges were originally conceived. Whether in aggregate terms—a better educated Saskatchewan—or in terms of specific skills and trades, the province needs a set of post-secondary institutions that can keep the province competitive internationally. Saskatchewan needs to unleash the province's capacity to meet its educational needs and that will mean rethinking the role of all players, including regional colleges.

Seen from the centre, the colleges are part of an evolving post-secondary system whose overall shape is still being negotiated and debated. To date regional colleges have played little more than a barely recognized niche role in this system largely because the *Regional Colleges Act* emphasizes only the provision of educational opportunities in local communities. The government's frame of reference, however, is the provincial labour market. From this perspective, programming should be developed and authorized with the goals of skills enhancement and labour market attachment in mind. Local concerns are acknowledged—this is still a distributed learning system—but for government, success is measured in terms of the preparation of students for jobs in the province. That the government has set out to recruit recent immigrants and encourage labour market participation among those that have traditionally had low participation rates is a signal that the labour market has become the main test of effectiveness for regional colleges and other post-secondary providers.

The colleges understand this imperative and share the government's desire to program for economic growth. At the same time, the territorial character of the system, and the prevalence of local loyalties, means that the colleges also see themselves as community development mechanisms in an undeclared competition for investment and attention. The "system" in Saskatchewan has evolved from the bottom, with each college reflecting local economic priorities and responding to the changing needs of their respective communities. With some justification the colleges take pride in their ability to manage new challenges, seize opportunities and serve what they take to be the changing needs of their communities. The government's focus on the role of colleges in ensuring a prepared labour force is entirely understandable and defensible, but it does not exhaust the role of colleges as understood within their respective communities. Here, an emphasis on social development and quality of life complements the focus on labour market attachment.

Expertise generated at the college level should be treated as an asset for the whole province.

The reconciliation of these natural (and overlapping) priorities is to be found in an increasing province-wide point of reference for strategic budgetary decisions, combined with a enhanced capacity among the colleges to engage in their own innovative programming. The result would be a system of increasingly differentiated colleges united by a set of goals and performance criteria developed at the provincial level. The colleges would retain their delivery role but expand their capacity to create programming that meets both local and provincial needs. Expertise generated at the college level should be treated as an asset for the whole province. Competition would increase in these innovative spheres but all players need to be disciplined by a set of expectations in established fields, expectations negotiated among and agreed to by all partners. Planning in this new system would be led by the provincial government and shared among the regional colleges and other post-secondary education providers all of whom, from their unique vantage points, contribute to a province-wide strategy for higher education.

To achieve a system of regional colleges displaying these qualities requires a strong dose of clarity regarding what the system, qua system, is supposed to achieve. The "system," in other words, needs its own mandate. Quite apart from the strategic planning and document preparation each college is expected to produce, the system requires its own plan, something that is already emerging but which depends on provincial leadership to be fully realized. This mandate should reflect the needs of industry, the demands of students and the opportunities presented in local communities.

What follows are a set of recommendations, divided into categories, intended to move the province and its regional colleges in the directions outlined above.

6.1 Recommendations: Mandate

6.1.1 The Regional Colleges Act should be revised to indicate that the colleges constitute a coordinated system of distributed learning opportunities that is an integral part of the post-secondary education system. This system has a constructive, and not merely derivative, role to play in the economic development of the province and the intellectual development of the province's students.

The regional colleges are not currently required to act in a coordinated manner or to focus on province-wide goals and needs. While partnerships exist, they are conceived on terms that will ensure the interests of specific colleges rather than broader policy goals. Improving the ability of students to contribute to the cultural and economic life of the province should be an official part of the regional college system mandate. It is not enough for the colleges to acquire this responsibility indirectly by brokering the programs of other providers. The current emphasis in the *Act* on distributed learning at the community level needs to be augmented with a clear direction to the regional college system to develop and achieve human capital goals. Requiring the colleges to engage in strategic planning in human capital terms would have the added benefit of strengthening local and regional voices in the establishment of the province's higher education priorities.

6.1.2 Subject to conditions set out below (see Quality Assurance), regional colleges should be permitted to develop their own programs and credentials in areas of emerging demand that are not currently served by other educational providers in the province or that cannot be readily brokered from institutions in other jurisdictions.

If regional colleges are expected to participate in supplying the province with the human capital it needs, they must have an incentive to keep abreast of changing demand for careers that are only just coming into focus. Around the country colleges are shifting their programs, eliminating old ones, developing new ones. For example, to participate in the development of programs related to the green

economy, residential home building, care of an aging population and security services, regional colleges must be allowed to develop their own curriculum and award their own credentials. This level of independence would require a new approach to approvals and quality assurance as outlined below. The advantage is obvious: from their unique vantage point, colleges would inject an element of innovation into a system that too often relies on established patterns of programming on the assumption that these will suffice for the time being. If the regional colleges become the experimental laboratory for new programming, there will be some failures. That should encourage caution in program approval as well as the development of partnerships to share risk. Colleges should not be rewarded for failure, but they should not be penalized for trying.

6.2 Recommendations: Strategic Planning

6.2.1 Regional colleges should be given stewardship responsibility in their respective regions for contributing to a rigorous, system-level educational needs assessment that is premised on matching provincial labour market conditions to programming choices in areas deemed critical for the provincial economy.

The current boundaries in the college system should be reinterpreted as "stewardship zones" for which the college has leadership responsibility for assessing demands and opportunities. Most colleges already adopt this attitude, but regional boundaries are sometimes interpreted in exclusionary terms and other colleges are discouraged from offering programs regardless of comparative advantage. The sharing of facilities and resources should be a natural feature of a cohesive system and the pooling of knowledge regarding program needs a requirement of planning and resource allocation. All colleges should be aware of and concerned to ensure that programming choices are justified in province-wide terms.

6.2.2 The Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration should expedite the development of a Saskatchewan labour market analysis (using information from the regional colleges, the Apprenticeship Commission and other reliable sources) to establish provincial targets for education and skills training programming in areas deemed critical for the provincial economy.

It is not feasible for any entity, government or otherwise, to predict the labour force needs of the entire province. On the other hand, if the regional colleges are to adopt a province-wide perspective, as we are recommending here, then they require province-wide intelligence regarding the need for particular programs in light of labour force requirements. Too often the colleges complain that they are not part of program initiatives as they emerge, but only when courses must be mounted and instructors found. There will always be a "just-in-time" quality to training, but if the colleges are going to be drawn away from repetitive programs toward those that are genuinely needed, they must be made part of a system of establishing what those needs are.

6.2.3 Regional College plans for university courses should articulate with the enrolment plans of the provinces' universities, which in turn need to consider making greater use of the colleges to expand their student base.

Provincial demographics combined with active pursuit by universities in neighboring provinces have made recruitment of qualified undergraduates a priority for the provinces' universities. In spite of the opportunity to address these challenges by establishing strategic working relationships with the colleges, the universities have by and large neglected them. Courses are offered, but the pattern of offerings is routine and repetitive, with no opportunity afforded by either university to complete an undergraduate degree in a combination of face-to-face, televised and online programming. Nursing will eventually be an exception. The point is that the idea of a post-secondary system, or even a regional college system, will struggle until the universities begin to treat the colleges (and SIAST) as active partners in a student centred project of increasing the province's human capital.

6.3 Recommendations: Programming

6.3.1 The colleges should continue to broker programming developed by SIAST and seek to ensure credit transfer, but colleges should also be encouraged to seek low-cost alternatives from out-of-province suppliers where SIAST is unable or unwilling to approve program offerings.

The practice of partnering with post-secondary providers other than SIAST and the province's universities is well underway in the colleges and there appear to be no immediate threats to these developments. This recommendation is intended merely to reinforce the soundness of this practice and the need for competition to ensure that students in the province are not deprived of educational opportunities because of a presumed monopoly status accorded to other post-secondary institutions.

6.3.2 The current trend toward developing expertise in particular training areas should be formally recognized, with each college given the opportunity to petition for "leadership status" in one or more areas of recognized competence.

Colleges have a legitimate ambition to add value to the education opportunities in the province. They do not have sufficient capacity to do this in many areas, but their unique community relationships and industry partnerships afford colleges a chance to carve out programming niches. The tendency to characterize this ambition in terms of "centres of excellence" is unfortunate given the overuse of the term "excellence" in general and the appropriation of the phrase by universities and granting agencies. Whatever the terminology, it does make sense to recognize colleges, in the context of strategic planning, as uniquely suited to pursue certain avenues of programming, with national and provincial partners as well as on their own.

6.3.3 An Adult Basic Education Strategy should be developed in conjunction with other ministries of government (for example, Ministries of Education and Social Services) that would commit the province to multi-year performance targets for graduation and allow certain of the regional colleges to be awarded "leadership status" in this area.

Statistics Canada data on educational accomplishment in Saskatchewan indicate that much remains to be done to provide potential and current members of the labour force with the literacy and numeracy skills required to function in a knowledge-based economy. The responsibility for ameliorating this situation does not appear to rest squarely with any agency of government. Regional colleges have acquired significant capacity and have shown a willingness to innovate (see Online ABE, page 24), but without a coordinated approach that establishes targets, provides multi-year funding and closely monitors success, progress will continue to be sporadic. The current focus on signing partnerships and launching short-term programs needs to be augmented by a commitment to substantial measureable progress over a multi-year timeframe.

6.4 Recommendations: Quality Assurance

6.4.1 As a matter of priority, regional colleges should be required to develop and make public a set of system-wide performance indicators consisting of financial and non-financial measures, which embody the strategic aims of the system, reflect efficiency and effectiveness criteria, and are aligned with the Government of Saskatchewan Accountability Framework.

To realize the concept of a regional college system in concrete terms, the "system" should have explicit outcome performance indicators that focus on service, financial, strategic and relationship goals. As tempting as it might be for government to develop performance indicators, this is a task better given to the colleges themselves. Their willingness to invest energy in the project is already evident. Government's role should be one of encouragement and facilitation, even if the ultimate approval of these measures, and the strategic and business plans associated with them, is a public responsibility.

6.4.2 New programs of study leading to a college certificate should be submitted to a Program Approvals Committee chaired by an official of the provincial government and consisting of at least three members appointed by the government and drawn from the regional colleges and other higher education providers in the province.

The principal objection to allowing regional colleges to offer their own certification is the absence of any means of ensuring that programs meet quality standards. These concerns are apparently set to rest when colleges broker courses, presumably because the province's other post-secondary providers are deemed to be accredited. Colleges have begun to experiment with adding their names and logos to certificates provided by other institutions, but this practice does not provide the colleges with the kind of independence that the *McArthur Report* advocated in 2005. To achieve that independence requires the creation of a quality control system sufficiently independent of the colleges to remove conflicts of interest. The precise composition of the Program Review Committee suggested here is intended merely to begin the conversation. The point is that the province needs a quality assurance mechanism to attest to the quality of all programming (not just new programs issuing from the colleges), and the colleges need such a mechanism to gain an independent place in the world of certification and continuing education.

6.4.3 A database must be conceived and implemented such that the data required to monitor the implementation of strategic goals and measure progress against performance indicators is collected using common definitions and agreed upon classifications.

6.4.4 To enhance planning capabilities and to foster a student-centered higher education system in the province, consideration should be given to introducing, at the primary school level, a student identification system which would permit colleges, as well as other education providers, to track the ways and places in which students in Saskatchewan access educational opportunities in the province.

The Regional College system cannot be properly managed without common data definitions and a reliable system of data collection. Agreed upon data categories are critical to accurate forecasting and performance-based strategic management. Currently, data is unreliable and cannot be assumed to generate comparable numbers across the system. Obviously, the ministry needs accurate data for financial accountability purposes, both within the provincial government and for accurate, detailed reporting to the federal government (e.g., LMA/LMDA). But reporting aside, data are vital for any quality assurance project. All participants in the system must have faith in the data and adequate data monitoring must be in place to discourage creative interpretation.

Work is currently underway to develop a common way of measuring FLEs, which includes consistent ways of counting participant hours. In addition, a new ABE Student Records database is being developed by the ministry and tested with post-secondary institution partners in 2010-11. This database should improve consistency, particularly if/when skills training is included, as common data fields from all post-secondary institutions would be stored in one place.

6.5 Recommendations: Budgets

6.5.1 The ministry should develop an overall operating budget for the regional college system and allocate resources to each college based on: (1) a fixed cost formula reflective of the intended scale of operations, and (2) an activities-based formula reflective of the costs of agreed upon programming.

Current regional college budgets received from the province are the product of historical allocations, externally imposed imperatives and internally generated goals. Each college needs a budget that recognizes its fixed costs. This budget should be built around the intended size and scale of each operation, taking into account unique circumstances that justify different costs in different regions. Variable costs associated with programming should reflect primarily the number of students enrolled in different programs and their costs.

6.5.2 Within the limits imposed by legislation and by requirements of other funding partners, regional colleges should be permitted to move funds between budgets to achieve economies and realize priorities.

Persistent complaints from the colleges about reporting requirements and budgetary rigidities could be addressed by providing greater flexibility within budget envelopes. Standard accounting requirements would, of course, prevail, but colleges would benefit from the responsibility of managing their budgets and retaining savings for investment in new programming.

6.5.3 To encourage experimentation and innovation the government's annual budget allocation should include a provision for the development of new programs that have been agreed to in principle by the Program Review Committee (see above).

The colleges are capable of generating their own revenues by offering tailored programming to local industry and public sector organizations. These funds support operating costs, such as salary increases, that are not always covered by government grants. The creation of an innovation fund in each college would be an explicit recognition that colleges have a responsibility to revise programming, prepare new curricula and experiment with new initiatives, and that the government has a responsibility to encourage innovation. The strength of the college system, from a programming point of view, comes from its ability to access the knowledge that resides in local communities, both regarding demand and supply of innovative programming.

6.6 Recommendations: Governance

6.6.1 A model set of by-laws should be developed that could be used, with appropriate amendments, by all regional college boards. These by-laws should, among other things, outline the duties and responsibilities of members and provide for a Governance and Executive Committee to develop criteria for board composition and identify potential board members.

Current boards of regional colleges are under-institutionalized. The selection process, which is largely opaque, invites members to interpret their appointment in terms that may not be consistent with good governance. Appointments need to be regularized, with the boards taking responsibility for nominating candidates according to agreed upon criteria and government taking responsibility for responding constructively to nominations.

A process of top down selection with no board involvement inevitably creates the impression that board members are political appointees whose principal loyalty is to those who appointed them and not to the regional college. This impression may be agreeable in some quarters, but it is not consistent with governance requirements.

6.6.2 The ministry should develop a training program for all board members based on sound governance models and delivered in the context of publicly funded higher education.

Current training for board members is generic in character and intended to provide an introduction to the requirements of organizational leadership. A new and more robust model is required, in which the responsibilities of board members is a central topic and the formal organizational requirements of governance are established. This program should be mandatory for all board appointees and should provide an opportunity for certification.

6.7 Recommendations: System Evolution

6.7.1 Provision should be made within government to ensure that responsibility for the evolution of the system of regional colleges—their number, their notional boundaries and their strategic objectives—is vested in the ministry with adequate opportunities for representation to be made by the regional colleges.

The *Act* provides the minister with the authority to approve of structural changes to the regional college system and to provide direction in these matters. It appears that the approvals part of this authority has been more actively employed than the directives part. It is not clear that the province has the right number of colleges or that they occupy the right boundaries. Nor is it clear within these boundaries how many sites should be maintained and at what level. These are both business and policy questions; they should not be settled by the ministry on its own or by regional colleges on their own. Nor can they be delegated to the Saskatchewan Association of Regional Colleges, although the latter should be represented on a ministry body designed to discuss, in a collegial forum, the performance and evolution of the system. The system, qua system, is government's responsibility and provision should be made to ensure that there is an appropriate organizational response.

6.7.2 The Saskatchewan Association of Regional Colleges should undertake to present to the ministry and the public at large with an annual report that recounts the progress of the system toward its performance goals and features the particular achievements of each college.

There is little point in discussing the regional college system as long as that system does not take an accounting of itself. The current situation, in which the system is simply an aggregation of colleges, must give way to one in which the colleges submerge their identities long enough to give an accounting of themselves as a provider of distinctive programming opportunities within the province and, by virtue of that, the legitimate recipients of public support.

6.7.3 The current website that purports to explain the regional college system in Saskatchewan should be dismantled and replaced by an integrated student-centered portal that provides information regarding current programming and certification within the regional college system including information regarding admission and registration.

If the system of regional colleges is to be more than a collection of territorially dispersed programming sites, students need to believe that the system is organized and integrated for them. They should not be obliged to enter the system based on where they live and their proximity to one or another college. Information on courses of study, when they are offered, admission and so on, should be made available in a manner that allows students to choose their course of study and plan how they can best access the program.

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